



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**South Brooklyn Community High School**

**Public School 698**

**173 Conover Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11231**

**Principal: Vanda Belusic-Vollor**

**Dates of review: March 26 – 27, 2007**

**Reviewer: George Wallace**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

South Brooklyn Community High School has 151 students between the ages of 16 and 21 who have either dropped out of high school or been excessively truant. Therefore, this is a transfer school providing a second chance for students in a small highly positive environment. The school is run in conjunction with Good Shepherd Services with the aim of accelerating the credit accumulation for student graduation. Students are admitted throughout the year and therefore often 50% are new to the school in any one year.

The school has a locally defined catchment area, and is housed in a new purpose built building. The ethnic composition of the school is: 77% Latino; 17% African-American; 4% Asian, Pacific Islanders and native Americans; 2% White. One percent are English language learners and 8% are special education students. The school receives Title 1 funding. Attendance is low by high school standards city wide, but annually at around 75% is over 35% higher than the attendance of these students when they were in regular high schools.

As an empowerment school, South Brooklyn Community High School has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. This school, jointly with the Good Shepherd Services, is currently revising its periodic assessment program to meet the direct needs of its students especially designing a curriculum-aligned periodic assessment measuring progress against critical thinking skills.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school provides an exceptionally strong supportive learning environment for students and as such, relationships between students and staff are excellent.
- Students and parents are extremely fond of their school and students know and value the fact that there are staff that they can turn to in the event of concerns or anxieties.
- Students receive frequent up to date information on their academic progress as well as their advancement towards reaching their goals.
- The advocate counselor program is strong, valued and highly effective.
- The school ensures that the value added to students' academic achievements as a consequence of the alternative approach to formal education is very good.
- The principal of the school and director<sup>1</sup> of the Good Shepherd Service are both well respected.
- Monitoring of the teaching and learning program is efficient.
- Expectations are high from the moment students join the school.
- Student progress is monitored closely and as such frequent interim diagnostic assessments are made to determine whether current approaches should continue or changes be made in light of new information.
- The school gathers and uses a wide range of data to determine levels of success on a range of fronts, and subsequently makes changes as necessary.

### What the school needs to improve

- Use the Comprehensive Education Plan as a working document to be shared by all staff and which includes references to the strategies to be used in working towards reaching the action plan goals.
- Ensure that all staff know and understand the importance and value of data analysis, and therefore have the skills required to analyze and synthesize school data.
- Continue the professional development program to raise the quality and consistency of teaching through the school.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the report all references to 'director' will mean 'director of the Good Shepherd Services'.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well-developed school.**

The school in partnership with the Good Shepherd Services provides students with a very safe, supportive and constructive learning environment. This is a school based on the principles of continuous improvement. Students make a commitment to attend this school and in doing so all staff travel the 'extra mile' to endeavor to ensure that each student's time at school is highly positive and fruitful. Approximately 68% of students each year graduate with a local or Regents Diploma.

The curriculum is carefully designed on the basis of students' needs. As a result students follow courses which they need in order to achieve credits. This is an accelerated program relative to that of normal high schools. This is a good strategy as students at the school on average stay about 20 months and in that time need to acquire as many credits as possible in pursuit of their Regents Diploma. On this basis class sizes are deliberately small in order to promote high levels of personal attention. Aligned with this schedule, is the highly positive use of the school budget for advocate counselors who, on a daily basis, provide another extremely important, highly valued and successful tier in student support. This means that there is at least one person in the school that students fully trust and if appropriate will share concerns and anxieties.

The principal effectively uses the wide range of data available to the school. Much of the analysis forms the basis of the evaluation of the school year that leads to a detailed Comprehensive Education Plan. In this plan the goals for the forthcoming school year are outlined and from it strategies for achieving the goals are thought out. However, there is no translation of the goals into a working action plan for all staff with associated professional development planning outlined to illustrate major ways of reaching such goals. Nevertheless, the current professional development program is directly related to school improvement. Teachers are also highly committed to the school and are always evaluating and reviewing their approaches to their work. Both the principal of the school and director of Good Shepherd Services are well respected by the school community. They, together with the staff, have the capacity to secure continuous improvement. The school runs very smoothly and students are well focused and engaged in their work. Expectations throughout are very high.

### **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 collects and uses a wide range of highly relevant data. Information is gathered on students at the point of acceptance into the school and includes students' achievements, and previous attendance rates. This is very important to ensure that students are placed on the right Regents courses and with the right advocate counselor. On entry baseline tests also contribute to the school leaders and faculty knowledge of the

standards of achievement of students. Performance data, and soft data, for example about attitudes to learning, general progress judgments, are collected and used highly efficiently on a frequent basis. For example, fortnightly 'benchmark' assessments are given to all students for all classes they are following. Teachers set and mark these and students receive their results promptly. Advocate counselors use these results as a basis for discussions with students about their progress towards their goals, and ultimately towards success in gaining Regents credits. This transparency of assessment data is valued by students, even though sometimes it can bring a degree of disillusionment if grades are not high enough. In such instances the skills of the advocate counselors come into play to support and turnaround negative to positive thinking. Data collected and analyzed on behavior, changes in patterns of commitment, lateness and even student views of teaching (source – student evaluation of satisfaction survey) also helps motivate students and further supports the work of the school. Students are taught in mixed grade classes on the basis of need and therefore data is student and class specific.

**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.**

School data and a wide range of other information is available to the school leaders who use it successfully to aid their goal setting for forthcoming years. The element of goal setting that is insufficiently developed is that of translating the core goals into a working action plan, shared by all staff and containing the professional development strategies that will help the school to reach their goals. The existing goals are relevant and focus on the school as a whole. For example, the main goal for this year is to ensure that students know and understand their studies in such a way that they can analyze, interpret, evaluate and hypothesize as a consequence of the higher order thinking skills taught. This requires a significant period of professional development attended by all staff.

The principal knows all of the students and is engaged in gathering students' views of their experiences across the school. This together with the information gathered from various sources ensures that she is well aware of what is working and what requires attention. In addition, while the informal network across the school is very strong, it is supported through a raft of carefully engineered formal gatherings. For example, one method used fortnightly, is the successful speed conferencing, which ensures all teachers highlight key issues with a wide range of colleagues to up date everyone over student issues, progress and achievement.

The school is devoted to students who have very specific needs and who at times constitute a risk to their personal progress and academic improvement. The good use of data ensures that teachers and counselors know their students' needs and calculate the best strategies to ensure difficulties are overcome. They succeed far more than otherwise. All staff have high expectations of students no matter what their past performance. At the point of enrolling, students commit to an intensive program of study aimed at high achievement. Parents are also heavily involved in commitment to support their son or daughter and agree to aid the school in supporting student studies. Goal setting is a well-established element of student guidance. Students work with their counselors to set clear, manageable and time specific goals that are frequently discussed and progress evaluated.

**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 well developed.**

The curriculum is very well designed to meet student needs and strongly supported through the tight support programs and ever improving approach to teaching. As such it is aligned with the mandated curriculum so that students can rapidly gain the credits they require on route towards a Regents graduation. Electives are in art, music, computer skills and media, and Spanish communications and culture. The school also offers a valued program of after school internships. Teachers are well aware that they are accountable for improving their teaching and consequently student outcomes. They also know that they are not alone in the pursuit of a fresh start and positive conclusion to students' school lives. Currently the school is working hard to improve the quality of teaching and effectiveness of learning through a highly focused program about raising students thinking and interpretation skills.

Budgeting decisions are driven by students' needs. The best examples are in the area of work of advocate counselors. The fact that each counselor has a small caseload is very important to the success of the program. It allows them to meet students on a daily basis and attempt to ensure that issues are nipped in the bud before they germinate. The partnership between the Good Shepherd Services and the school indicates that personnel and finance have been directed towards the academic, personal and social well-being of students. Equally important to the success of the school is the fact that scheduling is based on the premise of what is in the best interests of students. It is particularly impressive that such specific attention can be maintained throughout the year, since every day is a potential entry day for new students.

Teaching largely engages students, however, there is inconsistency in the quality of teaching across all subjects. Staff know and respect students, and work hard to ensure that their academic needs are met. Students attending school each day is a high priority and the school has excellent systems in place that are largely very effective in maintaining significant levels of attendance.

**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.**

The hiring process is thorough and rigorous. Applicants have to demonstrate a high commitment to the school mission and values. In addition their track record has to show that they are able to offer more than just teach a subject. Staff know they will be given plenty of opportunities to develop as a teacher and ensure that their teaching portfolio will reflect good quality career development opportunities. Professional development is well organized, purposeful and specific to the goals identified by the principal and director. There are plenty of opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. This occurs through teacher lab sessions, peer observations and through the various strong informal and formal discussions that occur. The principal frequently observes classes and feedback is always given and discussed. Currently there are two trainee principals from the Leadership College who are attached to the school as part of their course. They have been observing teaching frequently causing a reduction in the number of visits to classrooms by the principal. Although they give feedback, there is a need for them to

analyze their findings and draw up general conclusions of strengths and areas for development across the school.

Teamwork throughout the school is very strong, as are meetings involving all staff. There is a common goal which is to ensure success for students. Information exchange is intensive and valuable. Staff know the issues facing students academically and personally. The principal and director are well respected. The school has the capacity to continue to improve because the current leadership and model for running the school are strong. The school runs smoothly and procedures are clear and understood. The school is good at ensuring that any partnerships align their work with the schools' academic and care goals for students.

**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 well developed.**

School planning is based on the work of constructing the Comprehensive Education Plan. It is from this that the principal and director generate the goals and professional development program required to achieve the goals. However, there is no specific action plan that is used by the principal and director through the year with the staff, nor do they identify points in the year where critical evaluations are made to determine the level of success, whether the direction of their original focus should remain or amendments made. Critically this is not shared with all staff. However, it is very clear that both the principal and director know exactly what the core issues are that face the school and endeavor to work to develop these. As a consequence, comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms are a frequent feature of the work of the school. Gathering such information is essential to ensure that students maintain their focus on their goal of graduation.

Student progress is measured and used wisely to further develop students' knowledge and understanding. Assessments are frequent. It is through school devised benchmark assessments in particular, but also standardized tests that provide transparent information for students and all staff involved with each student. These form the basis of an influential tracking program as a foundation to all discussions about student progress, aspirations and overall development. The outcomes of year on year work does drive successive phases of goal setting, but too often the rationale is invisible to most staff, especially at the planning stages.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: South Brooklyn Community High School (HS 698)</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