



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Minerva Mirabal School for Law and
Journalism**

**Middle School 321
21 Jumel Place
New York
NY 10032**

Principal: Pamela Russell

Dates of review: December 12 - 13, 2006

Reviewer: Amanda Whitehead

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Minerva Mirabal School of Law and Journalism is a middle school that is located in Washington Heights. Minerva is a new school that shares a building with two other middle schools. Initially the school opened its doors to grade 6 students in 2004-2005 and has now expanded, over the last two years, to include students through grade 8. The total number of students enrolled is 383.

The student population is comprised of 85% Hispanic, 14% Black, 1% White and less than 1% Asian students. The school has 29% English language learners. The school is Title 1 eligible with almost all students qualifying which is a higher percentage than the average for similar and City-wide schools. Attendance is 92.5% which matches the City-wide average and is slightly higher than similar schools.

Eleven percent of the school population are special education students with individualized education plans. The school hosts a variety of services to meet their needs, which are coordinated by the special education teacher support services. Such services include self-contained classes, collaborative team teaching, speech and language support and occupational therapy.

The school has two academies, the Journalism Academy and the Law Academy, which allow students with special interests in one of these given areas to deepen and develop related skills and to be exposed to career opportunities in the fields of law and journalism through experiential and project-based learning. The school also collaborates with community-based organizations such as The Children's Aid Society, which ensures the physical and emotional well-being of children and families.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school uses data to identify individual, group and grade-level needs.
- Effective support services, such as academic intervention services and special education services, accelerate students' progress.
- A caring learning environment has been established through strong staff/student relationships.
- Effective and well-planned professional development is identified through consideration of both staff and student needs and impacts on learning outcomes.
- Links with parents encourage participation in school activities.
- Progress is tracked and goals are set for individuals through informed use of assessment data.
- Student attendance rates are high, in part due to rigorous monitoring of absences.
- The school is well organized and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish a clear and consistent understanding among all staff of how to link data analysis to planning the curriculum and instruction, including differentiating learning to meet students' needs more accurately.
- Develop collaborative planning across the school to achieve whole-school goals.
- Build on established practice to involve parents and caregivers more systematically in their children's learning.
- Develop recruitment strategies to ensure that newly-appointed members of staff have the skills and commitment to support the school's drive for improvement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Parents, students and staff agree that this is a very happy and caring school. The Comprehensive Education Plan describes Minerva as a 'small, nurturing learning community' that provides students with a well-rounded educational experience. The challenge of developing a new school in a shared building has been fully embraced by the principal. She has shared a vision with all that encompasses 'education as the great equalizer'.

The school provides the opportunity to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills through the professional fields of law and journalism. Despite catering to the needs of challenging students, the school has high expectations for all which are shared with students and parents. Assessment in the school is rigorous. Support services are respected by staff and provide a good service to individuals that need extra focus.

There are strong mechanisms in place to support a growing staff. Professional development is beginning to address inconsistency in practice amongst staff in order to develop a move towards achieving the principal's vision.

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 wide range of data at individual student, group and class levels. The principal also has a good overview of the differences in performance between grades. The support services in the school work well to use data to help them to monitor the performance and progress of students with individualized education plans, and English language learners.

The school has also identified, through a skills analysis, that elements of mathematics are areas in need of development. This data analysis is shared with teachers on a monthly basis at collaborative team meetings and prompts discussion regarding progress of individual, group and class needs.

Within the classroom, teachers carry out ongoing qualitative and quantitative assessments that are set out within the assessment binder. Although the quality of these is good, there is a lack of consistency in teachers' use of these resources. Teachers gather and use standardized assessment; administer weekly quizzes, unit exams and generate portfolio pieces. Teachers have been trained to utilize an electronic system to generate, track and monitor student performance data and progress to build proficiency and expertise.

The school's focus is mainly on the performance of individuals. It places less emphasis on the analysis of data to assess the progress and achievement of the various groups within

the school, so that for example there is less comparison of the relative performance of the different ethnic groups or boys and girls.

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 administration works well to plan overall goals and to feed that information into team planning meetings to inform decisions about content areas and grade-specific issues. Where there is a whole-school focus, teachers are directed towards that area through collaborative planning. Some teams plan more collaboratively than others to reach those goals.

As a result of data collection and analysis, the administration sets measurable goals for students. The literacy and mathematics coaches work with individual teachers if support is needed to translate those goals into classroom practice.

The school has a good overview of students in greatest need and makes effective use of the academic intervention services and other resources to help focus on their needs. The academic intervention services coordinator’s use of data to help move on individual students, and to track progress, is particularly effective in accelerating progress. Attention is also paid to improving the achievement of the considerable numbers of students who have been held over.

High expectations are conveyed to students who are all clear exactly what they are working towards and the milestones they need to reach in order to get there. In-class support meetings with teachers support this development. Staff have trained students to interpret their assessment data and to use the information, in collaboration with staff, in setting their goals. They realize that it is their responsibility, as young adults, to work alongside teachers to achieve these. The school works to involve parents in their children’s education, through workshops, meetings, the school website, and newsletters, as well as personal communication when there are particular issues to discuss. Parents of special education students are involved in the creation of their children’s individualized education plans. Some parents feel that they know what progress their children are making in meeting their goals, but this is still a developing area.

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 given a great deal of thought to expanding opportunities within the curriculum, particularly in the areas of law and journalism. Instruction is lively and engages the minds of the students. In addition, the school has placed great importance on the value of speaking and listening skills through planning for accountable talk. This not only builds students’ skills, but enhances their self-confidence. Staff are beginning to plan using thematic approaches to make learning more coherent.

The literacy and mathematics teachers, along with the coaches, use assessment data to develop action plans for students at risk that includes supplementary services in addition to a general education curriculum. Teachers plan together on a weekly basis. Data is shared with them, but their capacity to make effective use of this data as a basis to plan differentiated instruction is limited. Some staff group students accurately and differentiate learning tasks, but this is not sufficiently well established to ensure proficiency in this area as it is inconsistent.

The use of the budget, as well as staffing and scheduling, is led by the needs of students as revealed by performance data. Funds are allocated to building capacity in areas of weakness, and scheduling is carried out to make best use of the strengths of teachers.

The school has a number of strategies to engage students and build motivation, such as peer tutoring. Forums such as the student government give students a voice in school affairs. Students know that staff care about them and will help them when needed. Attendance is slightly above that of similar schools. Good attendance is promoted partly by effective systems and as part of the school's ongoing efforts to create a collaborative home-school partnership.

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 has some effective and able teachers within the school. She has identified specific skills that she requires staff to have and is building a strong team that can meet the needs of the students. Because of falling enrolment and the subsequent loss of teacher positions, she has had few opportunities to appoint new staff.

The principal regularly carries out walkthroughs and formal observations as part of the process of monitoring the progress of both teachers and students. This is supported by the work of members of the administration who also monitor, support and review progress. Information gathered from these activities is used to determine professional development needs. In addition, faculty members are surveyed to involve them in planning their own professional development. In this way, professional development is focused on areas of highest need. It takes a variety of forms that include in-house workshops, demonstration lessons by experienced teachers, coaches and consultants, lesson observation and visiting other schools. Collaborative planning sessions allow teachers to share proactive and build skills. There is also one-on-one assistance for any member of staff who has a particular difficulty or area for improvement. This developing system has the potential to strengthen capacity and support newer members of staff. The school recognizes the need to build the confidence and capability of new teachers in best practices and content-specific skills.

The principal is well respected by staff, parents and students. It is generally felt that any issue would be addressed quickly and efficiently by the administration.

The school makes effective use of outside agencies such as Columbia University and USA Today that help to foster links with journalism. It uses community-based organizations to enrich and enhance learning. The Children's Aid Society, based on the campus, provides a range of support services to both students and parents.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan is regularly reviewed, and appropriate action taken when required. Various committee teams are formed to review progress towards the goals set in the plans, and those in supporting action plans. These teams evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives which have been established to meet whole-school goals, using an established protocol. Modifications and adjustments are then made in response to these findings.

The school has very clear goals, included throughout the assessment files for example, that are used to evaluate students' progress. In addition, students are very aware of what their goals are and the progress they are making toward reaching them. The progress of individual students is monitored closely and the effectiveness of interventions are reviewed and modified accordingly to accelerate progress.

The principal has a good overview of the progress of students in different subjects through a skills analysis and over different classes. As a result, she is able to target support in terms of both professional development and scheduling.

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Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Minerva Mirabal School for Law and Journalism (MS 321)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.	X		
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
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.	Ø	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.	X		
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
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.	Ø	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	