

Institute for Collaborative Education

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Institute for Collaborative Education

Content Of The Report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

What is the school's overall performance

How well does it meet New York City's evaluation criteria

Other key observations

Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Institute for Collaborative Education

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

This is a school of 432 students from 6th to 12th grade with class sizes between 20 and 25. It was opened in 1993 as part of a drive to combat high drop out rates among students. Students are drawn from a wide area and generally represent five New York boroughs; many face challenges in their home life. Entry into 6th grade is generally below the average for this age and around 30% of students are identified as having some special educational need that requires additional support.

Institute for Collaborative Education

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The leadership of the school inspires both students and teachers. The principal and assistant principal work together well using their complimentary skills to the benefit of the school.
- The school is inclusive and has well-developed systems to support students of all abilities and backgrounds.
- There are high expectations for students' and well-developed systems for monitoring their progress towards the set goals.
- Teaching skills are well developed; they take students' study skills to a good level and produce confident, articulate students.
- Students display high levels of independence and confidence in a climate of mutual respect among staff and other students that enables high levels of collaborative working.
- Students enjoy school and respond well to the challenge of the innovative curriculum and the more college based approach to learning through personal projects. This is evidenced through the high levels of attendance.
- It provides many exciting extracurricular opportunities for students to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the wider world.
- The devolved system of management is well developed and enables teachers and teams to take on responsibility that benefits the school's development as well as their own professional development.
- The school works well to overcome the physical limitations of the building, classroom space and facilities available.

What the school needs to improve

- Aim for consistency in disciplinary expectations of all teachers and their response to all students
- Develop an overarching curriculum overview that gives greater clarity in the program cycles for each subject at each grade and makes clear links between the thematic approach and the skills that are being taught through these
- Provide greater clarity when defining the expectations for each subject at each grade level.
- Improve the quality of students' handwriting and presentation to enable them to fully capitalize on the thematic approaches through raised expectations and greater efficiency in their work
- Develop the technology curriculum to give a clear long-term program.

Institute for Collaborative Education

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an overall well developed school.

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

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well-developed.

The school has a waiver from the Regents High School Examinations so does not have all of the information in line with other schools for direct comparison at different grade levels. However, students in the senior year do sit these papers as an additional measure.

Across the school, large amounts of data relating to students' progress and attainments are collected. This is well developed and used effectively to identify students' specific needs, track their progress over time and identify curricular areas that need further attention; for example, the school identified the mathematics curriculum as an area for review to better prepare students for future tests and assessments. Tables and charts of results are clearly set out and allow the school to record and follow students' achievements and standards over time.

One of the school's major strategies for evaluating performance for graduation at senior level is through submitting work for assessment by an 'oral defense' panel made up of teachers, parents and other students. Here, the student's thesis is stringently evaluated through detailed questioning to see if he/she has a sufficient depth of understanding of their topic. This is very much a college-style approach and provides a challenging critique of students' work to see whether it is of a high enough standard.

The school's systems for analyzing students' performance are well developed and the data is used well to identify students who need additional support and take effective action to address these needs. While the data gives a clear standard for students at senior level, there is less clarity at earlier grade levels about what constitutes an acceptable performance. Agreement on this would enable better comparisons of standards and set a clear expectation for all teachers and students for the end of each grade.

From a low entry point, progress through 6th Grade is good, particularly in the spoken elements of language arts. However, attainment could be even better for all students by teaching an efficient writing style to be used consistently and applied to all subjects, which would support the increasingly high demands made on students by the curriculum.

Institute for Collaborative Education

Quality Statement 2: 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

From often what are below expected levels of attainment at 6th Grade, good teaching and an innovative curriculum ensures that students generally achieve above the expected levels by the time they graduate from the senior school. There are high expectations of the standards required for students' graduation and well-developed systems for monitoring their progress towards the set goals. The school makes good use of the full range of data available to it such as behavior and attendance. The school is pro-active in ensuring that these factors do not become barriers to students' progress and the challenge of the curriculum and the work they do ensures high levels of attendance and little in the way of behavioral problems. However, not all teachers yet have the expectations of the best with regards to acceptable attitudes and there is a need for greater whole school consistency in some of these.

There is little in the way of additional personal support, for example, through the use of student councilors. However, with relatively small classes, teachers take on these roles and, as they know their students so well, they are quickly able to identify any who are at risk of falling behind in their work and support those who have emotional needs. All of this is enhanced by the support shown by the majority of parents who receive regular and detailed reports on their children's standards and progress.

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school is inclusive and provision for students of all abilities and backgrounds is well developed. There is a clear focus on developing the whole student and the approach is very successful in creating the rounded person. Teaching skills are well developed and extend students' study skills to a good level. Teachers ensure that work is closely matched to each student's ability and needs. While having a waiver for the normal test regime, the school has a good record of attaining high standards through students submitting theses to detailed scrutiny and being subjected to an 'oral defense panel' for their literary criticism paper and historical thesis. Additional to these they also submit a science thesis and an experimental design paper. All of these are to a high level of competency. As a result of this approach to personal study, students are articulate, reflective and display high levels of independence and confidence.

Students enjoy school and respond well to the challenges of the innovative curriculum and the more college-based approach to learning through personal projects as evidenced through the high levels of attendance, mostly within the 93-94% range. Good examples can be seen of students cooperating in pairs or small groups on themes within the topics. This enhances their social skills and allows them to learn effectively from each other, benefiting from the individual strengths students bring to the table. The school also

Institute for Collaborative Education

provides many exciting additional opportunities for students to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the wider world. Through a well developed program of visits students experience at first hand other cultures ranging from Eastern Europe to South America and commit themselves to supporting the work of others through; for example, helping with the clear up in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

The school is working towards a modified mathematics curriculum and to further develop the technology curriculum throughout the whole school. There is also now a need for a clear, concise overview of the whole curriculum that would provide greater clarity in the construction of program cycles for each subject and at each grade level linking the well-developed thematic approach more closely to the skills that are being taught through these.

Quality Statement 4: 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.

Students, parents and teachers recognize the leadership qualities, care and personal charisma of the Principal. Even though well established in the school, his vision and commitment continue to drive forward progress and expectations. With the good support from, and additional skills of, the Assistant Principal, the leadership works well as a team, combining their individual strengths for the benefit of the school. The management systems in school and teaching methodology do not suit all teachers and the school is careful to recruit those who have a commitment to this style of education. As a result, most of the current teachers have made a positive career choice by applying to the school and there are a number of very highly qualified teachers from universities with an international reputation. There is a well-developed devolved system of management that involves all teachers and allows them to take on individual roles and responsibilities in areas that reflect their strengths and interests, which benefits the whole school.

This is particularly effective in those teachers who are established members of the school staff who take on the roles of department coordinators. It also provides good opportunities for all teachers to enhance their own pedagogic and management skills through using this as further professional development. The result of this is some very reflective and highly creative thinking and a strong, collegiate approach to all development issues in the school.

Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its 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, with features which are well-developed.

There are proficient systems through which all school staff are effectively involved in assessing and evaluating students' progress. This information is gathered from a range of sources through close collaboration of teachers and advisors. In addition to the more formal assessments there are a number of ways in which the school gathers additional

Institute for Collaborative Education

information on performance such as the regular, frequent meetings between students and their advisor to review the data provided by subject teachers. Using the array of data available to the school, students who are over or underperforming are quickly identified and individual programs are put in place for them. Monthly meetings of the school's Promotional Review Committee evaluate the work and progress of those students and this information is communicated to parents. This information is not always used fully and consistently to inform teaching and learning and to re-align programs. The data collected from the classes and subject teachers shows that at their end of year assessments between 30% and 50% of these students make sufficient progress to be removed from the list. All parents also receive almost monthly progress reports or work habit summaries, which along with the two parent teacher conferences give great opportunities to enlist their help in supporting their children and tackling any underperformance.

Other key observations

The school works well with limited facilities such as the lack of a cafeteria and more significantly, a library that students can use for personal research. While this does not hold students back significantly, it does reduce their opportunities for additional guided study support in school.

Institute for Collaborative Education

Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are “objective” when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 			X
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>			X
<p>1.1 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>			X
Quality Statement 2: 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.	o	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>		X	
<p>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 warranting attention.</p>			X
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			X
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>			X
<p>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.</p>			X

Institute for Collaborative Education

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.			X
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.			X
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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
3.6 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
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	

Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			X

Institute for Collaborative Education

Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 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 interim 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 each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.		X	