



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The High School for Media and Communications

High School 463

**549 Audubon Avenue
New York
NY 10040**

Principal: Dr. Janet Saraceno

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Reviewer: Stuart Satinet

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The HighSchool for Media and Communications is one of four high schools located on the George Washington Educational Campus. It is located in the Washington Heights area of Manhattan. It has approximately 600 students in grades 9 through 12. About 94% of students are Hispanic, 5.5 % Black and less than 1% are from other ethnic groups. Approximately 30% of students are English language learners and about 11% are special education students. In 2006-07, 58% of the student body was male. About 94% of students are Title 1 eligible which is a higher figure than similar or City schools. The school has considerably better attendance figures than similar schools and also exceeds the average figures for City schools. It shares common areas with the other schools on the campus and these include the auditorium, library, Science labs, cafeteria, gymnasiums, clinic and outside spaces.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A committed principal provides decisive leadership which has a clear focus on raising achievement further.
- The good use of data across the school improves overall achievement.
- The administration provides effective leadership to develop teaching strategies for raising achievement.
- Teachers engage in collaborative activity on a regular basis to improve their practice and to discuss data.
- A sharp focus on attendance has led to significantly higher attendance rates and this has a positive impact on student performance.
- An extensive program of workshops and activities increases the engagement of parents with the school.
- A program of enrichment activities raises students' expectations and enhances the wider curriculum.
- The school has clear goals which are discussed, understood and acted upon.
- Students are actively engaged in their own learning in response to a range of teaching strategies.
- Students are well supported by effective guidance services.

What the school needs to improve

- Integrate new data systems into current practice to establish a coherent overall picture of student performance.
- Develop action plans which identify longer-term development goals.
- Extend the process of identifying particular groups of students such as the higher achieving and monitor the differences between achievements of male and female students.
- Increase the range of inter-disciplinary work to share best practice across subject areas.
- Develop grading policies to achieve greater consistency between teachers and subjects.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The principal was involved in the re-design of George Washington High School and was appointed to establish the new High School of Media and Communications in 1999. She has worked collaboratively with the principals of the three other high schools which share the building to dramatically change the tone of the campus. The schools have much in common, but each has also established a distinctive provision and identity. There is a strong emphasis on raising achievement linked to careful scrutiny of data at all levels. As a result of positive leadership and very effective teamwork the school has achieved significant improvements in student achievement. The graduation rate for 2006 was 83% and this figure exceeds the rates of similar and City schools. The school has developed effective strategies for meeting the needs of its English language learners who make up about 30% of enrolled students and approximately 70% of them graduated as part of the 2006 cohort. The school is very confident in its ability to use data to bring about improvement and recognises that further progress will require the introduction of new systems and strategies.

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.

The principal has a detailed knowledge of the achievements of individual students based on careful records and this contributes to a culture where there is regular data gathering linked to discussions on progress. The strong emphasis on Regents scores promotes consistent improvements in achievement in this assessment. Regular diagnostic tests are carried out during the year to determine progress and these are linked to well-focused interventions which have a significant impact on achievement. A scheduled common meeting time effectively develops a systematic dialogue about data which involves teachers at all levels. Vice-principals ensure that data is shared and closely analyzed. Intervention strategies are re-focused as a result of data analysis and this produces year on year improvements in achievement. The school administration regularly reviews overall data to look for patterns and trends and focuses on particular groups such as English language learners.

The four campus high schools meet regularly to share ideas and this promotes the effective use of comparative data over time. There has been limited discussion of data linked to gender. Although a great deal of good work is done to raise expectations and encourage students to consider further education, the early identification of high achieving students would enable further progress to be made. The school has started using new periodic assessment information (Princeton Review) and a new style of progress report. It is beginning to blend these with existing data to provide a coherent picture of student progress.

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.

The school has clear goals which are outlined in the comprehensive education plan. These are discussed at cabinet and faculty level and this creates a clear awareness across the school about what needs to be achieved. The vice-principals take responsibility for drawing up action plans in subject areas and achieve this well through collaborative meetings. These meetings are effective and make an impact on the everyday practice of teachers and, through them, on students. There is a clear sense of direction and a good understanding of what needs to be achieved. There are clear grading policies and teachers show a good understanding of students’ needs based on their regular assessments. However, the grading strategies are still inconsistent because they vary between departments and teachers. Differentiated instruction is an expectation in all classes.

The school operates on an annual planning cycle but there are also examples of three year development plans. The administration recognises the value of longer-term planning for the school as a whole and is taking steps to agree longer term goals.

All teachers have individual discussions with students which focus on academic achievement and these help to ensure that targets are understood at a student level. Case conferences are held for those in most need of improvement which involve counselors, students and parents in discussions. These make effective use of data to decide on support and intervention. A culture of high expectations exists and this is supported by the parent association which organizes workshops in such subjects as “Strategies to improve grade, attendance and scholarship”. The school has recently introduced a proactive program of support which successfully provides conferencing time for students to meet with teachers on issues connected with raising achievement, such as study skills.

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 school has empowerment school status and this increases its flexibility in relation to professional development, scheduling and curriculum alignment. Departments are analytical about what is going on in the classroom and there are extensive discussions about teaching strategies which have an impact on the classroom experiences of students. Teachers welcome the opportunity to “customise courses for students’ needs” and coaches suggest a variety of strategies and support their introduction. This enables the alignment of courses to meet needs. Following reviews of performance data, adjustments are made to scheduling and pacing calendars. Double periods are used to give students a more intensive experience and this encourages greater levels of engagement. The school increases engagement by developing study skills to support students with their learning. A new freshmen enrichment program for grade 9 students involves student teacher conferencing which enables teachers to recognise and respond to the individual needs of students. A parallel education program targets the needs of a particular group of students.

A high level of collegiality supports the development of effective classroom practice; model lessons are taught, ideas are shared and new teachers are mentored. Inter-disciplinary approaches effectively share expertise across subject teams and it is planned to extend this approach in future years. Funding is specifically directed to provide professional development opportunities which support changes in classroom practice.

The school recognises that regular attendance and punctuality are essential to student progress and there are very successful strategies which have achieved figures significantly better than City and similar schools. At the heart of this process is an effective attendance team which reviews data on a daily basis, liaises closely with parents and teachers and organises awards and incentives. A range of enrichment activities effectively encourage student engagement. Parents are regularly invited to workshops and social events which has increased their engagement.

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 principal takes a proactive approach to staff appointments, insists on demonstration lessons and involves subject staff in the appointment process. This pays dividends in the quality of teachers appointed. Mentoring support is provided for all new teachers and this successfully aligns their work to the needs of the students. There is a clear focus on improving standards and professional development activities have a measurable impact on student achievement in areas such as literacy. The school responds effectively to needs identified through collaborative meetings but no overall whole-school professional development plan is drawn up.

The principal and assistant-principals observe classes and give formal and informal feedback to develop practice. Well-targeted walk-throughs successfully promote the sharing of ideas on improving instruction. The scheduling of regular team meetings facilitates the discussion of student achievements and leads to refocusing of work where appropriate. This structure is part of a conscious effort to drive further improvement. Students confidently seek advice from services such as counselling and the on-site clinic which provide good support. The school is well organised and the principal is respected.

Partnerships with outside bodies broaden the curriculum and enrich students' experiences. Students have opportunities to make visits outside their community such as the teacher designed inter-disciplinary day in Central Park. The school also "brings the world to them" through high profile drama events and visits by groups such as the Harlem Ballet. The impact is an enhanced overall experience for students as measured by increased levels of confidence and increased college application rates.

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 strong focus on data in the school contributes to a comprehensive education plan that sets realistic but challenging targets which are regularly scrutinized during the year. All teachers are involved in this process and there is a firm commitment to improving on the previous best. Diagnostic tests take place in a regular and systematic way and teams work together to share ideas about the progress of individual students and class groups. Common meetings effectively monitor progress against the statistical goals set at the beginning of the year. Students and parents share in this process and performance data is regularly discussed. The main focus is on annual improvement and the school puts less emphasis on setting longer term improvement goals.

The school has come a long way since its foundation in 1999 and the commitment of its leaders to data driven improvement is partly born out of the low levels of attainment that needed to be overcome. The improvements which have been achieved reinforce a commitment to regular monitoring of performance at all levels. The overall goals are clearly defined at whole-school and subject level but the school is working on developing them further by increasing the use of more detailed implementation plans which include specific actions to be taken during the year. Progress towards goals is fully evaluated before a new plan is drawn up but more detailed and time-referenced planning would support the evaluation process and refocusing of resources.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: High School for Media and Communications (HS463)	∅	✓	+
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	