



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Edward A Reynolds West Side High School

High School 505

**140 West 102nd Street
New York
NY 10025**

Principal: Jean McTavish

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Reviewer: Ronnie Young

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Edward A Reynolds West Side High School is a transfer alternative high school located in three-year old purpose-built premises in northern Manhattan. It had been established in a previous building since 1962. This academic year, 525 students are enrolled, of whom 20% are special education students and almost 4% are English language learners. Less than 1% of the students are White and Asian. The rest are equally divided between Black and Hispanic. Numbers of males and females are virtually equal. All students are over-age and under-credited. Attendance, at 70%, is below target compared to City school, but above average for similar schools. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 76% students being eligible.

Each student belongs to a family group which consists of about 22 students with two teachers. This group meets daily for 40 minutes and is a credit-bearing course. The teachers, acting as family group advisors, are responsible for those students' welfare in the school and conduct academic monitoring as well as giving social and emotional support and are specially trained. This means every student has their own advocate or parent-figure in the school, which has helped raise their self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Cyclical system of quarterly credits and feedback points allow systematic close monitoring of progress.
- The school provides very strong social and emotional support from daily family group meetings.
- There is a good emphasis on raising self-esteem and a sense of belonging by including opportunities for developing communication and self-development skills.
- There are very close relationships with community-based organizations and youth development bodies.
- There are flexible programs, including a wide range of electives based on students' interests and needs.
- There are close staff and student relationships, with staff matched to student need, where possible.
- The principal is hard-working and committed, and able to effect change.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure formal data from outside bodies is used regularly by all staff and broken down into specific groups of relevance to the school
- Develop further the use of differentiated teaching and learning.
- Pay as much attention to the “how “of learning as the “what” and explore the use of learning styles and multiple intelligences.
- Make sure incremental goals and procedures for their evaluation and revision are included in all lessons and plans.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The emphasis at this school is very much on the individualization of the student experience, and each student is individually attended to with ongoing and frequent monitoring of progress and achievement. Differentiation is by content rather than task and targets are very much geared to academic achievement with no guidance as to how this can take place.

It is a very caring and friendly school with great emphasis on social and emotional support, including the opportunity to take part in teambuilding, trust and communication exercises. Students and staff are on first-name terms with each other, and even though there are over 500 students, the staff and students all know each other by name. Students and staff have high expectations of themselves and of each other. The wide range of electives means each student can enhance their self-esteem and confidence with a program tailored to their academic needs and interests. If the greatest strength of the school in the context of this review is its tailoring of the curriculum to students and capability of reacting to individual circumstance, its greatest need to improve is in the way it measures the impact caused by those changes so it can put in systems to become more proactive in raising achievement.

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 assessment data from a variety of sources, although relies most heavily on transcript information. There is a rolling admissions program that takes place throughout the year and each student is admitted individually. His or her transcript, which contains Regents test information and subject grade, is evaluated to determine areas of strength and weakness. The transcript, along with the interview, is used to determine other academic needs. Individual education plans are reviewed upon enrollment to the school. Individual teachers gather initial diagnostic information at admissions time, which allows each student's skills profile to be understood, but this is neither consistent nor formalized. "Achieve 3000", which allows the school to identify reading scores for all students is being piloted this spring, to support better differentiation of reading materials.

The school works on a cyclical assessment and feedback program, and data is gathered and fed back to students eight times per year, when progress is measured by comparing student achievement with course expectations. After each cycle, internal and external summative data, in the form of scholarship reports and Regents data, is reviewed. Four-year cohort data, alternative cohort data and simple passing data are reviewed for professional learning and instructional purposes. Informal analysis of test results is also carried out by each department to identify areas that may need to be reinforced during the next cycle.

Attendance data is regularly gathered and assessed. This is regularly distributed to family group advisors, and attendance incentives, in the form of theater tickets and recognition, are thought to have been instrumental in raising attendance levels. Data is systematically used for the individual student, subject area and class group, but is not broken down any other way. It always compares itself with similar schools and previous years' performance, although the principal believes the individual and flexible nature of the school means those comparisons are not always useful. The school wishes to improve its use of formative assessment and to that end is in the process of professional development to learn how qualitative data can be used quantitatively to inform teaching and differentiation.

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.

Individual students' goals are almost always based on the acquisition of Regents credits, whether they are based on the long-term achievement of the Regents or short-term achievement of cyclical grades. Some staff try to make targets specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-limited, but this is not done by all staff across the school or collaboratively. Cyclical goal setting mean feedback is given regularly and allows students to earn credits in a relatively short time. It also allows programs to have a balance of goals that are essential for achievement, yet achievable on an individual basis.

Each student can produce a maximum of 4.5 credits. Students earning fewer than two credits per cycle have immediate intervention from their family group advisor and develop a plan for the coming cycle. Referrals may be made to the social work team, to special education or other intervention services, such as before or after school. If a student has missed three or four weeks of learning, they can work individually at cyberschool, studying computerized programs to catch up. This method can also be used outside school if the student is ill or pregnant. Credits are awarded based on the amount of time for which they log in. A designated member of staff oversees this. There is about a 10 to 15% dropout rate at the school, usually for a variety of non-academic reasons, but all staff at the school believes every student accepted has the capability of graduating. Lack of time, where students have too many credits to make up before they are 21, is the main reason students are not accepted into the school and they are always referred elsewhere.

Students also have high expectations, once they have started to achieve. In the classes visited, students were confident of success and most looked forward to exams so they could demonstrate what they know. The school tries really hard to involve parents, although parent participation is limited. Parents are consulted regularly, and a few form strong partnerships with the school to support their child's education.

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 mandated for Regents subjects, but the electives are chosen for their usefulness to students or based on students’ interests. Examples of electives for spring 2007 include film studies, theater criticism, critical writing, global health issues, advanced algebra, teen parenting, botany and forensics.

The electives curricula have been carefully designed so students get lots of practice in writing and using skills necessary for their mandated subjects, so that progress and challenges can be noted across subjects. Teachers are held accountable for students’ progress throughout. Differentiation is accepted to be important in class delivery, and is carried out according to needs revealed by student data. Students have the opportunity to learn communication skills and self-development in family groups, as well as team building, trust, how to ask for help and conflict resolution. This has enhanced students’ confidence and made it easier for them to learn effectively. Family groups are grouped into neighborhoods, each under the supervision of an assistant principal, and each neighborhood team of advisors meets twice-weekly for briefings and to discuss issues.

Budgeting and staffing decision are based on student need and monies are directed wherever necessary. Teaching staff have several different roles, as instructors, family group advisors, advocates and specialist tutors. All staff are flexible and enjoy close relationships with students. Scheduling is always carried out on an individual basis and is designed to allow students to accumulate credits at an appropriate rate for them. Staff scheduling is carried out according to how many mandated classes they will be teaching and what they can offer to the electives program that students have chosen. Staff members enjoy the opportunities and variety that the electives programs offer; in addition to the way they enhance students’ learning.

Student engagement and attendance are high priorities. Staff are careful to teach at the appropriate level for student success and make a great effort to ensure content is relevant to their experience. For example, a lesson about fact and opinion was conducted using an article about obesity from The New York Times. This supplemented the discussion students had had the previous day in a global health issues class. If a student is absent, a phone call home will be made, and after three days, a visit from a school staff member takes place. Incentives for high attendance have been instrumental in raising the attendance rate and attendance targets are currently on track, but the school accepts that some students have circumstances outside school that make attendance difficult. Wherever possible, the school assists these students in non-academic ways, such as the allocation of a social worker.

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.

Staff are selected on their ability to work with district 79 students and to have high expectations for them, as well as for their professional qualifications. Temperament and subject knowledge are especially important, as is a sense of excitement at working in the

school. The use of data is becoming an increasingly important criterion in the selection process. All teachers have a strong belief in their students' abilities to succeed. Even after graduation, students are welcome at the school for advice, help or any other reason. Professional development is taken seriously at the school. Groups of teachers have attended training in California on differentiation. Several teachers have attended Outward Bound training on experiential learning and have used those techniques in family groups. Staff are encouraged to share good practice and common lunchtimes and common prep times have facilitated this.

The principal conducts regular informal class visits and, along with the assistant principals, formal observations. The assistant principals conduct walkthroughs on an ongoing basis with regular feedback. Peer observations are not conducted regularly. The school has initiated daily meeting slots for staff at the start of the day to facilitate joint planning, case conferencing or other collaborative work. Various teams meet then, such as the family neighborhood groups or subject teams. The staff also has common lunch and some joint preparation sessions when this can take place.

The principal is highly regarded by the assistant principals, the staff, the students and the parents. Her hands-on style of management and approachability are particularly admired and she, like the rest of the school population, is on first-name basis with everyone, including all the students. This assists her capacity to effect change. The school runs smoothly with the help of the three assistant principals. Orientation is carefully planned so each student receives the same treatment, no matter at what time in the year they enroll. The frequency of the cyclical assessments mean students can slot in quickly. Graduation and transition are handled on an individual basis and students participate fully.

Youth development organizations play a large part in students' lives. The school's six full-time social workers support many students and the in-house health center is available for a whole host of medical issues. The daycare center is essential for students who are mothers. Other examples of support include guidance services, which have just won a joint bid to take the Advanced Placement United States history students on an educational visit to Boston. The school enjoys close relationships with many community-based organizations.

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 undeveloped.

The school accepts that although it has strengths in gathering data and using it to plan and revise individualized programs, it is less skilled at evaluating progress in ways other than achievement of credits. Monitoring, apart from that of students, is not carried out and procedures are planned for the monitoring of each department and subgroup of operations in the school. Whereas the school prides itself on its flexibility and its responsiveness to a variety of circumstances, there is currently no mechanism for measuring the impact of these decisions and no tradition of quantifying effects.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is written with full teacher involvement, and with formalized structures in place for responsibility and timescales identified, but the plan is not revisited regularly or consistently. The school does not have strong systems of monitoring,

evaluation and revision. It is prioritizing capacity building in terms of tracking the progress of groups of students so it can be proactive rather than reactive to students' needs.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Edward A Reynolds West Side High School (HS 505)	∅	✓	+
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		