



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Repertory Company High School for Theater Arts

**High School 531
123 West 43rd Street
New York
NY 10036**

Principal: Michael Mehmet

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Reviewer: Stephen Walker

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Repertory Company High School for Theater Arts (High School 531) is a small high school of 186 students in grades 9 through 12. It is located in the Broadway area near Times Square in Manhattan. The school is housed above the Town Hall Theater within a very non-traditional school setting. It was created in 1985 as an alternative high school but has now become a specialized theater arts high school. Students follow a four-year theater arts sequence and a full academic curriculum. All students study the major components of theater arts including acting, drama, dance, and music and stage craft.

The school population consists of a rich mixture of cultures with 46% Black, 42% Hispanic, 6% White and 3% Asian. Over 73% of the students are girls. English language learners comprise 4% of the school population and 6% are special education students. The majority of students are Title 1 eligible which is higher than in similar or City schools. Attendance of students is over 92% which is above average for City schools.

The school was designated as an empowerment school in 2006. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. This school is currently engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students specialize in theater arts as well as following an academic program.
- The majority of students meet the graduation requirements and progress to college education.
- The principal provides visionary and supportive leadership with a clear emphasis on the success of all students.
- The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis supported by the teams of teachers and support staff in a small nurturing environment.
- There is a positive culture in the school resulting in good attendance.
- The family atmosphere of the school values the individual and this is greatly appreciated by both students and parents.
- Teachers and support staff work well as a team to support the performance and personal development of students.
- The school has invested in an expanding program of professional development.
- The comprehensive theater arts dance program is strength of the school.
- There are very good links with arts and cultural organizations including the local theaters.

What the school needs to improve

- Analyze and use assessment information with particular reference to gender, ethnic groups, subjects, classes and similar schools.
- Accurately measure and record student progress in science, social studies and theater arts.
- Introduce a more structured and rigorous intervention program, based on assessment data that supports the lower achievers to raise their performance.
- Review assessment and instructional program for special education students and English language learners.
- Develop further the shared vision across the school so that there are agreed school strategies for improvement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school enables students to specialize in theater arts as well as follow a full academic program. The principal provides visionary and supportive leadership with a clear emphasis on the success of all students. He has successfully led the school towards a more specialized theater arts status and has embraced the challenges of empowerment status. He is well supported by the assistant principal and an extended cabinet team who are facilitating the improvements in the school. The school is proactive in evaluating its performance and seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students.

The school is developing systems to analyze performance data to improve the progress of students. It has also recognized the need to develop the analysis of assessment data by teachers so that it becomes an integral part of their work. Teachers are developing periodic assessments to provide current information about individual students and their progress. The current intervention program lacks structure and is not fully based on assessment that supports the lower achievers to raise their performance. The school is aware that it needs to review assessment and the instructional program for special educational students and English language learners.

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 is developing systems to analyze performance data in order to improve the progress of students. There is a growing overall understanding by the principal of the performance in subjects and classes as well as the individual performance of students.

The principal analyses the attainment data from the education department including the accountability reports and the annual school reports in order to track differences between subjects and teachers. Individual student performance is analyzed through student progress reports and report cards in order to highlight underperformance. The principal has a detailed summary of assessment scores for each cohort. Teachers have developed baseline assessments at the beginning of the academic year in all subjects. The school is using the Princeton assessments and Achieve 3000 as structured assessments for the students. The school has worked with the Department of Accountability to train teachers in the use of assessment information. Data is now being used to identify the lower-achieving students in the Regents assessments who require targeted interventions. Class and subject grades are considered through the scholarship reports and trends are noted but this information is not widely shared.

Variations in the performance of gender or ethnic groups are acknowledged although there has been no detailed analysis of these differences or discussion about strategies to support specific underachieving groups. The performance of English language learners and special education students is analyzed and the school identifies the increase in the

four-year graduation rate for these students as an important priority. The school has not fully analyzed the variation of individual student performance between subject areas. The school does not consciously compare performance with similar schools although this data is available through the empowerment network.

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.

There are clear goals to support students so that they succeed in their courses but the school does not at the moment agree aspirational performance goals based on prior attainment for either students or grades. Teachers are developing periodic assessments so that they have current information of individual students. However, science, social studies and theater arts departments do not have fully developed systems to accurately measure and record students’ skills and progress.

Teachers discuss the progress of their students with the principal and assistant principal. The guidance counselor meets with the students in order to discuss the grades on the student report cards. Teachers are aware of student underperformance and give extra time to support students who require additional help with their work. Classroom assessment is becoming a more regular feature of classes but analysis of this data is not at the moment an integral part of teaching and learning.

Additional classes are provided in mathematics and reading for students who are achieving below the expected levels. There is some push-in and pull-out support by the special education teacher and paraprofessional. Credit recovery classes and repeat classes are arranged for some students. English language learners have an extra class for language development. However, the programs and tracking procedures for special education students and English language learners are not fully effective. There is a lack of structured and rigorous intervention programs, based on assessment data, that supports the low achievers to raise their performance.

Parents are provided with regular report and progress cards and invited to parent teacher conferences twice a year to discuss expectations. Attendance at these meetings is variable. Students are generally aware of their broad targets but the school does not set individual performance goals that are shared with parents and students.

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 deliberately moved away from the alternative high school approach towards a specialized theater arts high school. Students now follow a four-year theater arts sequence and a full academic curriculum. There is a core provision in numeracy, literacy, science and social studies that all lead to Regents accreditation. The comprehensive theater arts program is a strength of the school and includes major components of acting, drama, dance, music and stagecraft. All subject areas have

developed curriculum planning units for the year with clear learning skills and assessment units. A consultant worked with the team of teachers in the theater arts to develop a coherent program across the school. Teachers are accountable for their classes and some subject areas have developed lesson plans for each unit of work with clear learning objectives. Planning is beginning to be driven by assessment data although it is in the early stages of development. For example, Access 3000 has provided baseline reading scores for grade 9 so that reading material can be matched to reading ages. Not all instruction is sufficiently differentiated to address the specific individual learning needs of each student.

Staffing decisions and the scheduling of classes are clearly guided by the drive to improve student performance. Additional classes in mathematics and reading are provided for lower-performing freshman as an alternative to Spanish. Budgeting decisions are focused on improving students' performance. For example, the investment in the three consultants was specifically undertaken to support the teachers in their planning and classroom practice. The school has begun to invest in laptops and interactive whiteboards as valuable teaching and learning tools.

In some lessons teachers actively engage and challenge students with a variety of learning activities. Students appreciate these teachers who insist on good behavior and make the work interesting. The school is aware that it needs to develop further the sharing of good practice in order to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers and support staff work well as a team to support the performance and personal development of students. Students are confident that there is a teacher or counselor who they can contact for support or advice. Attendance of students is over 92% for this academic year and demonstrates the commitment of the students. The school has helped raise attendance rates through awards and prizes and effective follow-up procedures.

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 provides visionary and supportive leadership with a clear emphasis on the success of all students. He has successfully led the school towards a more specialized theater arts status and embraced the challenges of empowerment status. He is well supported by the assistant principal and an extended cabinet team who are facilitating the improvements in the school. The pace of change is fast and expectations are high so the principal is aware he will need to develop further the shared vision across the school so that there are agreed school strategies for improvement.

Staff are increasingly selected on their capacity to improve student learning and adjust to the empowerment goals. The school has extended professional development for the teachers. A professional development committee has conducted a survey of teacher needs and works closely with the administrative team. The additional consultants have provided considerable support in lessons leading to a growing culture of improving instructional practice. The school has prioritized professional development in classroom management, planning appropriate activities, the use of assessment data, differentiation, accountable talk and display work.

Lesson observations are well established in the school and all teachers have a formal observation by the principal or assistant principal with feedback at least once per year.

The system for recording lesson observations is not yet consistent. There are opportunities to develop further inter-visitations between colleagues in order to share good classroom practice. Each member of the cabinet is allocated to a subject area and works well with teams of teachers to evaluate and improve their instruction.

The school is well supported by an impressive number of arts and cultural organizations including partnerships with American Place Theater, Roundabout Theater, Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Arts and Carnegie Hall. There are excellent opportunities for all students to take part in a variety of school productions. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, supported by the teams of teachers and support staff.

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 school evaluates its performance, seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students. It is aware that programs for English language learners and special education students need urgent attention and modification. Whole-school performance has been evaluated and four clear goals for the year have been agreed. These have not yet been included in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The principal intends to update the plan so that it is a working document and clearly reflects the key priorities for the school. The principal acknowledges the need to involve the cabinet and subject leaders more in the development of subject plans so that there is ownership of and commitment to the action plans.

The cabinet team has used the Princeton Review and progress reports to compare student progress within the classrooms and across the school. However, these have not been fully shared with teachers and are not being well used to revise plans and goals. For example, the proposed intervention program after school requires clear assessment details from each member of staff in order to identify the specific level of need and subsequent organization of the support provision, but does not currently have this information.

Periodic assessments are being designed for subjects to provide regular diagnostic measures of student performance. The collection of data is beginning to influence plans but this is at an early stage at the moment. Literacy development is now a shared objective on all subject curriculum plans as it was agreed this was an important area for development. Analysis of the Progress Report led to the whole-school commitment to increase the graduation rate to 80% or higher in relation to the City and similar schools' data.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Repertory Company High School (HS 531)	∅	✓	+
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	