



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**New Design High School**

**High School 543  
350 Grand Street  
New York  
NY 10002**

**Principal: Scott Conti**

**Dates of review: March 14 – 15, 2007**

**Reviewer: Charles Lupton**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Under the leadership of the current principal, the New Design High School was founded in 2003, when it enrolled 9th grade students. Since then it has added a grade each year and now serves 384 students in grades 9 through 12. This is the first graduation year for the school.

The school serves a diverse population of students with 55% of its population being Hispanic, 31% Black, 5% White and 9% Asian and other. The main language is English with 4% of students being English language learners and 19% are special education students. The school receives Title 1 funding with 70% of students eligible, which is significantly higher than similar and City schools. The school attendance rate is 86%, which is above similar and City schools.

This is an empowerment school. 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.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal, administration team and all the staff work very well collaboratively, are highly respected and strongly committed to continuous school improvement within a clearly defined, innovative school ethos.
- The structured, wide-ranging design curriculum, formulated in conjunction with Working Playground, provides an excellent framework for vertical curriculum alignment.
- The principles of design are deeply incorporated into each area of the school curriculum through many problem solving activities.
- The emphasis on developing each student as a holistic individual, able to make informed choices on work and behavior is a very strong feature of the school.
- The very positive relationships that exist between each member of the school community actively support students to take responsibility for their own actions.
- Innovative instructional methods used in many classes actively engage the students.
- The emphasis on skills-based instruction is applied effectively to each curriculum area.
- The daily 'Design for Life' sessions support students in preparing them very well for the school day, addressing issues early and providing a highly supportive framework for the students, combined with the excellent Wellness Center.
- The high expectations the school has that each student has the ability to gain a college place is fundamental to the school's drive for excellence.
- Constructive and continuous professional development supports all members of staff.

### What the school needs to improve

- Extend the existing good curriculum-based qualitative data collection systems to incorporate more quantitative data and use both to refine data analysis processes for all categories of groups and students.
- Develop school planning procedures further to include objectively measurable, interim goals and timescales, to monitor the effectiveness of all planning.
- Provide professional development in the collection and use of quantitative data.
- Continue to explore and develop differentiated instruction.
- Further develop systems within the school to achieve greater consistency in the way the school functions.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school with well-developed features.**

The New Design High School is a remarkable school due to the highly innovative way it incorporates design into each facet of school life. It has a clearly defined curriculum that helps all students develop their academic skills sequentially and that supports and celebrates adolescence. The school actively and successfully prepares students for adult life and for college which is a new aspiration for many of them.

Social and emotional support for students is of very high quality. The students are highly appreciative of the respect shown to them by the teachers who are all known by their first names. The students strongly believe that this elevates their respect for the staff and results in the very good behavior, cooperation and high quality work because they are 'working for a friend'. The staff work very hard to develop students as holistic individuals with significant success. According to parents, 'staff go the extra mile'.

The school uses qualitative data very well to understand the needs of students and student groups. However, it is still developing the collection and use of extensive quantitative data to support future progress, including more detailed planning.

The principal, in particular, is highly respected by staff, students and parents. He has a genuine, caring rapport with all school constituents. He and other members of staff and parents say the school is relatively new and some things still 'need to be ironed out'. This is the case and the principal and staff clearly have the capacity to accomplish this.

### 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 State data and its own extensive qualitative data to build an accurate and updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom and grade level. However, the school does not routinely collate its own quantitative data to confirm and support its rigorous qualitative assessment.

Using the available data, the school has thorough, frequently updated knowledge and understanding of the achievement of English language learners and special education students. The school does not routinely monitor ethnic groups although the principal does have a broad overview of the relative performance of these groups of students. The school identifies a range of specific student groups, for example, high achievers, and students at risk, and uses good qualitative data well in developing an understanding of their performance.

As the school was only founded recently, the 12th grade class will be the first to graduate. Consequently, the school is not in a position to compare its performance with similar and City schools or with its own past performance. However, the principal is keenly aware of how this school compares with others in areas such as ethos, professional development and qualitative assessment. Using the data available and through frequent collaborative activity, the

administration and staff have a good knowledge of the performance and progress of each academic subject and many constituent groups although this does not include ethnicity.

**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 whole school community is strongly proactive in working collaboratively to set demanding goals for immediate and long-term improvement. Consequently, the whole staff is strongly committed to, and understands, the developmental plans resulting in their active implementation. Plans are itemized and progress towards completion is monitored. However, plans do not contain objectively measurable goals or specific timeframes, making precise monitoring of their impact difficult to assess. The exception is the planning developed with the Working Playground, which contains timelines for completion.

The small size of the school and the level of mutual support between staff results in all staff working together effectively to implement plans that are sharply focused on developing each student, group of students, including classes and grades, and each academic subject. This results in admirable conformity and a strong understanding of how each planning element affects each aspect of the school.

The school has specifically identified a wide definition of students in greatest need that includes those at risk of under achieving, high achieving students and students requiring emotional support as particular focus groups. As a result, the school provides excellent support for all students who effectively and are actively helped to improve their performance.

The school sets very high expectations for students and conveys these clearly to all parties. Students and parents are regularly informed of their achievement and progress and goals are set with students for their next learning steps. If they are under achieving, the school is proactive in helping the student, explaining how to improve, involving parents if required. Very good self assessment rubrics that include learning behaviors and course content analysis are regularly used by students to monitor their own progress and set their own goals. This is an example of how the school ensures that students take responsibility for their own learning as a preparation for life. The school’s aspirational goal for all students to achieve a college place is strongly conveyed to all students, many of whom never considered this as a realistic option. The school has been successful in this respect with students currently being offered places.

**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 wide-ranging skills-based curriculum is carefully developed to integrate design in the broadest sense, incorporating problem solving at each meaningful opportunity, into each subject. Each year, the curriculum re-visits each of its elements very effectively with clear instructional goals that focus on sequential design elements, one for each grade: identity, community, perspective and future. This results in an excellent, clear continuum of experience that builds over 4 years to coincide with students’ developmental stages.

Teachers are held closely accountable for their instruction and how to improve it. Data is used effectively to inform instruction, which is lively and inclusive. The use of differentiation varies between classes. In some classes there is limited evidence of differentiation other than through expectation of outcome and level of support, resulting in some work not exactly matched to student need although students are actively engaged in their lessons. Examples of good differentiation are evident in planning and discussions between staff. Improving differentiation is currently a priority and the school is actively working on defining and strengthening this throughout the school. For example, in a coaches' meeting, differentiation was discussed at length, as was assessment.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are informed and clearly based on need. For example, some additional students, many of whom had low achievement levels, were admitted into the 9th grade. As a result, the school rescheduled classes to create an additional group and budgeted to make this a collaborative team teaching class. Other data-driven decisions have resulted in the hiring of additional deans and councilors to address behavior, attendance and emotional need. This is highly effective.

Daily Design for Life sessions start and end the day. Staff and students meet to talk, air successes and frustrations and prepare for the day before instruction. These sessions are very well liked by the students who treat the staff as friends while maintaining high levels of respect. Two additional sessions are scheduled each week that act as tutorials within an open framework. The level of mutual respect shown between every member of the school community is remarkable. Each student and each member of staff know each other very well and have enormous respect for each other. This results in a working atmosphere that is highly conducive and supportive in which students feel very comfortable to make errors and ask for help from the teachers and from each other.

Student attendance is given the highest priority so that students have access to as much instruction and support as possible. Rigorous procedures are followed to support this.

**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.**

Staff are selected carefully based upon their instructional skills, their holistic approach to assessment and commitment to the school ethos, which incorporates a willingness to improve personal and student performance and progress. As a result, staff all share the same goals and expectations and this supports the students well through conformity of approach.

Professional development for all staff is integral to the development of each element of the school and is included in its planning. A range of data is used to identify training needs and these are rigorously followed through in a wide variety of ways during the year to improve student outcomes very effectively. For example, there are enquiry teams looking at student success, academic culture and differentiated instruction. The future use of data is included on the agenda for these groups although the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data, which is a weakness, is not specifically highlighted.

The principal is a highly respected and welcome presence in the school and has the continuing capacity to effect change. He, and others, frequently observe classes and provide constructive advice for improvement that is followed through. One teacher remarked it is 'happy observation'. Teachers welcome each other into class and actively seek opportunities to improve, working together effectively in collaborative teams.

The school runs smoothly with set procedures although some staff feel that procedures are not always consistently followed through, leading to some inconsistency in practice which results in some confusion for the students and staff.

The school enjoys very good links with youth development and support services, in particular the Working Playground but also including many organizations connected to design and New York University. These links are very constructive and actively support school improvement and the students.

**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.**

All school plans, including the Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's performance review, focus on improving student academic and social outcomes. Successive plans build constructively upon previous ones as part of the school's continuous drive for improvement. This is achieved through whole staff collaboration to review the success of one year's plan and set goals for the following year.

Qualitative data is used well to monitor progress towards school goals but quantitative data is not utilized fully. The school is aware of this. Most plans contain realistic processes for completion but these are not linked to objectively measurable interim goals or timescales. As a result of the incomplete use of quantitative data and the lack of interim success criteria, the school does not have a complete understanding of the progress towards the implementation of its planning to reach its stated goals.

However, despite this, the school's widespread use of qualitative data is effective in comparing student progress within and across classes. It is also effective in comparing the relative performance of grades and academic subject, resulting in effective monitoring of the progress of plans. Should a plan need to be realigned, the school responds flexibly, resulting in continuous development and improvement in student outcomes.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: New Design High School (HS 543)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	