



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Liberty High School for Newcomers**

**High School 550**

**250 West 18 Street  
New York  
NY 10011**

**Principal: Melodee Khristian**

**Dates of review: May 14 - 15, 2007**

**Reviewer: Helen Donnellan**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Liberty High School for Newcomers is an alternative high school located within a site previously used as offices in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. All the students are English language learners. The school delivers a bilingual program to support students who have recently arrived in this country.

Students join either a Polish, Chinese, Spanish or English house in their first year at the school before moving into programs with less native language support in subsequent years as their English language competence increases. Native language support continues to be provided for students where this is necessary. One percent are special education students. Fifteen percent of students are Black, 42% Hispanic, 19% White and 24% are Asian or from other ethnic groups. All students are Title 1 eligible, which is above the average for City and similar schools. Attendance is above the average for City and similar schools at 90%.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school gathers detailed information on all its students, starting from the time they enter the school.
- Extensive support is provided to students and their families.
- The curriculum is delivered in four languages, enabling students to acquire English and make academic progress.
- Students show high levels of engagement and are confident to attempt challenging work to help them achieve well.
- Staff and students have high regard for each other and staff show respect for students' backgrounds and cultures.
- Students value what they learn about global issues and other cultures.
- High numbers of students make sufficient academic progress to move on to college.

### What the school needs to improve

- Structure planning so that goals are clear, with tasks, staffing, interim measures and timescales defined.
- Establish systems to routinely monitor progress against goals in all the school's plans.
- Extend how data on performance and progress is analyzed and compared to highlight similarities and variations.
- Develop a structured information plan for students to link academic progress to other key events.
- Ensure that data is used to determine how each teacher differentiates instruction.
- Extend observations of teaching so that staff have greater opportunities to learn from each other and share good practice.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The Liberty High School Academy for Newcomers is a school that welcomes students from all nations, regardless of their previous school background. This school is the first formal school for some students, who are well-supported in learning and adapting to a different culture and education system.

In 2005 performance in Regents examinations was significantly higher than that for similar schools and other City schools, reflecting successful learning outcomes for students in mastering a new language and subject knowledge in four years. High numbers of students move onto college education. The school gathers information on student progress and performance routinely, but this is not brought together in one location to give an overall view. Supporting students and their families is a strength of the school with programs to meet family and student education. Some teachers collaborate well to provide integrated classes which link subject areas to English language arts. The curriculum is delivered in four languages and teachers work hard to match materials to students' needs and interests. Data is not yet widely used to plan differentiated instruction, although teachers rely on personal knowledge of students as the basis for their work. The school runs smoothly and processes have been established to monitor and evaluate all aspects of school life as part of a commitment to continual improvement.

### 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 w**

#### **This area of the school's work is proficient.**

This is a school which makes great efforts to gather information on all its students even where no data is available from previous schools or countries. Facts are gathered from parents and students on all earlier academic experience, which are taken into account with initial tests in mathematics and English language to determine the student's first year class. Teachers gather information on all students in their subject groups each semester and maintain ongoing records of performance. Samples of written English work are routinely gathered each year and used to measure progress in their acquisition of English, but this is not replicated for other subjects.

The school has little prior information on earlier performance of many students, so diagnosis of special education needs is often dependent upon the strength of assessments carried out by the school staff. As many students are over the age for referral to special education services, the school is resourceful in meeting their needs within its own staffing. Information is available on all students, but is not always kept in one centralized location.

The administration is in the process of identifying high achieving students. While the school gathers a range of information on all its students, this is not yet used to compare

progress and performance with different schools or between the different language groups at the school.

**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.**

The goal of the school is that every student will graduate. Instruction, intervention and the efforts of all staff are clearly structured on this. Students are given a list of credits and Regents tests that need to be achieved, but this is not presented to give them an awareness of the time frame and how academic events relate to extra-curricular programs and factors such as college application. There is an expectation that teachers collaborate to review progress and plan instruction at monthly grade and department meetings. In some areas collaboration is established. For example, the grade 10 teachers for global history and English language arts plan together so that written work meets the requirements for English as well as covering the global history content, which enables students to be successful in both subjects.

The case study model has recently been introduced as a means for staff to consider interventions for any student whose progress has slowed or leveled. This helps the school to support students in greatest need of improvement.

Students’ families are well-informed and supported by the school. When students enter the school written information and DVDs are offered in 13 languages to make families aware of what the school provides. Information on progress is provided at the twice-yearly conferences in different languages, as well as through informal contact through the year. The school celebrates students’ achievements at these conferences and also gives parents information on how they can support the students’ learning at home. Twice-weekly classes in English as a second language are provided for adult family members.

**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 curriculum is well planned to meet students’ needs as they become increasingly proficient in English. Before they enter the school, students start to receive curriculum through an induction program which enables them to make a smooth transition into the school. The curriculum is enhanced each year with additional materials being provided to support the goal of all students graduating. Teachers work hard to identify appropriate test materials to match students’ linguistic needs and to limit the impact that language competency has on subject test outcomes. The curriculum is limited by physical space, for example no auditorium, gymnasium or science laboratory. The school has working partnerships with neighboring schools and has successfully negotiated occasional use of some areas to overcome its own limited space.

Teachers are held accountable through processes that ensure that lesson objectives are met in every class. Teachers use their knowledge of students to tailor instruction to

students' needs but formal data is under-used in planning instruction. As a result staff are not always certain that students are fully challenged.

Additional funding is used well to provide up-to-date and relevant materials in the classroom and for the library. The principal knows her staff well and assigns them effectively to classes, making the most of their strengths. The schedule includes double length instructional periods for English language arts, which allows for intensive, continuous work. After-school activities and Saturday school are routinely offered and taken up by students to support them in making progress. These sessions are staffed by the school, which allows continuity of instruction from the school day. Homework is given by teachers of all subjects, but this is not coordinated which leads to inconsistent workload for students.

Students are active in their learning, regardless of the language or subject. They also value the informal opportunities they have to learn from each other about global issues and other languages. Many students acquire other languages as well as become proficient in English during their time at the school.

Students are treated well by staff, who show sensitivity to their needs and the emotional impact that come with relocating to a new country. There is a high level of mutual respect between staff and students, which supports a positive learning environment. Students expressed the view that opportunities to mix more often with all students would enhance their global understanding even further.

The school ensures that all students are aware of the need to attend school, not cut classes or be late. Attendance is higher in grade 9 at 92% and falls to 89% in grade 12. The average for all grades is 90%. Non-attendance is followed up routinely and where students arrive to school late, missed time has to be made up by staying after the end of the school day.

**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.**

This is a school with little staff turn-over and staff numbers have grown since the school changed from a one year program. In recruiting teachers the principal seeks evidence of strong subject knowledge and classroom practice. She also takes care to explore their capacity to use data, by giving potential staff data and asking them to show how they would use this as the basis of instruction.

Professional development time is being appropriately used to increase staff familiarity with data and increase its use by all staff. The principal has sought the views of staff on their professional development needs, but these have not yet been reflected in the professional development program.

All teachers are observed by the principal annually as part of a formal process, which begins with a pre-observation meeting and concludes with feedback. In order to ensure consistency of instruction in different languages the principal supplements her knowledge by making effective use of colleagues from district 79, with specialist knowledge of English as a second language. Observing each other is not yet established as part of professional development. The re-design team is rigorous in evaluating the school's work and in

identifying areas in need of improvement. This is now an integrated part of the way the school works. Other groups or teams are not formally used to improve instruction.

The principal is respected for managing the school's growth from a one year program into a well-organized and successful four year high school. Established systems ensure that the school runs smoothly in her absence and standards of behavior in the school are made clear to students. They value her approachability and that she "finds ways to help you with even big problems."

The working partnerships with community-based organizations in health, support students and are key to helping the students remain healthy. The school also works closely with organizations to support students and their families in settling into the City. There are strong relationships with colleges and universities, where many students aspire to attend. This provides them with insights into college life and information about application procedures.

**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 goals within the Comprehensive Education Plan are measurable and allow staff to see what objectives need to be achieved during the year. Currently plans do not include interim measures by which progress can be tracked, so the need to make changes during the year is not easily identified. Plans also lack specific detail that shows the goals, tasks, staffing, interim measures and timescales. The school has an established process for planning through its re-design team, which meets regularly to plan changes in relation to the school's priorities and has identified subject and grades where change is needed. These priorities are not necessarily reflected in the Comprehensive Education Plan goals, as the school does not yet align its day-to-day planning with the Comprehensive Education Plan.

Different groups of staff review the progress made by students and trigger changes of intervention where progress slows or ceases. The small size of the school supports this informal approach to planning, as staff have frequent contact with each other and know the students well. However, review of progress does not take place within a defined process or make routine use of data, which limits the promptness of changes. The principal is aware of progress in relation to the school's priorities through her monitoring and knowledge of day-to-day functioning and progress. The absence of defined monitoring against interim milestones is reflected in the lack of formal records of progress against priorities, so staff and administration are unable to measure progress. The redesign team meets weekly with an agreed focus on school improvement. The focus for the current year is academics, school tone and student activities. A rolling program is being planned to review all aspects of the school's life routinely and inform future planning.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Liberty High School Academy for Newcomers (HS 550)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		<b>X</b>	
<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>		<b>X</b>	
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>		<b>X</b>	
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>		<b>X</b>	
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.	<b>X</b>		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		<b>X</b>	

\* 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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		<b>X</b>	

<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	