



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Chelsea High School

High School 615

**131 Avenue of Americas
New York
NY 10013**

Principal: Timothy Timberlake

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Reviewer: George Wallace

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Chelsea High School is a well-established school in SOHO Manhattan. It restructured its learning environment into three small learning communities in 2004, with each one occupying a separate floor of the school and led by an assistant principal. Until recently the school roll was stable at just over one thousand students, however, the school population is now 953 in grades 9 through 12. There are 33% Black, 62% Hispanic and 5% other students. Three percent of the student population are English language learners, and 17% are special education students. Most students travel considerable distances to get to the school, coming from all five New York boroughs. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school is operating at 120% capacity and has done so for several years. The number of suspensions is high compared to other similar size schools. Attendance at school is very low, and by the end of the 2004-2005 school year it was at 72%. Since then attendance has risen, and although it varies between the small learning communities, the school average for this year currently stands at 78%.

As an empowerment school, Chelsea School has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development service, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork. The school has useful professional links with several businesses. The school is also currently engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials, and is heavily involved in a student learning research project. The first such assessments have already been used by the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The academy structure is valued and aids the smooth running of the school.
- The school operates smoothly on a day-to-day basis.
- The school collects a wide range of performance data.
- The Empowerment Schools Initiative research project is being led and managed extremely well with total commitment and involvement by the project team.
- Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs arising from student data.
- Data reveals that student achievement is improving.
- Particular attention is given to improving performance and progress of students in greatest need.
- Student attendance is a high priority and the school has a wide range of strategies and is continually devising new approaches to raise attendance.
- Instructional activities engage the majority of the students.
- The principal uses data to make diagnostic assessments to note student progress and generate interventions.

What the school needs to improve

- School student attendance needs to be improved.
- There is a need to improve the quality and consistency of communication in all forms between the administration and the school staff so that teachers feel partners in the development of their school.
- The quality of experiences in school for sport and physical education requires improvement.
- Communication with students needs to be improved so that they feel valued partners in their education.
- To help improve teaching and further the development of action plans for subject and grade teams, academies need to raise the quality, and promote consistent methods, teacher's reflection and evaluation.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with proficient features.

Chelsea High School has the capacity to improve. Although some procedures work well and others are in their infancy, with several requiring some improvement and redesigning, the overall structures are in place for sound development. However, too often the core goals are neither communicated across the school effectively enough, reinforced frequently enough, or are they developed in partnership with teachers and students. A positive and well-supported feature of the school is the move to three small learning communities¹, which has proven to be successful. As such the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and basic procedures are largely understood by staff. However, there are some systems that are inconsistently applied across the school, for example, the teachers' role in raising attendance and the way lead staff support their work on attendance issues. The previous example is symptomatic of a number of other areas where systems and procedures require refining, for example, the quality and clarity of communication and expectations between the senior leaders and teachers. It works well in some areas, but in others the effectiveness of meetings and, for example, professional development, is diminished by the fact that staff are unsure of the core purpose of many sessions. Students also feel that they do not know what is going on across the whole school and nor do they feel like partners in their own education.

The school collects a wide range of useful student performance data. Even though the overall data indicates that student achievement is improving a more coherent team approach to agreed strategies for improvement is required. The principal uses data to make diagnostic assessments. Such information is used to make changes to groups of students to ensure that those at greatest risk are well served. The Empowerment Schools Initiative research project is being led and managed superbly well and the interim findings are very useful to the teachers at the school. The team steering this initiative are highly knowledgeable, committed and involved with this work which has the potential to lead to other similar projects and to influence some aspects of the way teachers work. The principal is respected and knows his staff well. In view of some of the areas for development, the school needs to sharpen its self-evaluation procedures at all levels.

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 gathers a wide range of performance data. It is the entry data that determines many of the freshman courses for the school. Teachers collect their own data based on teachers' assessments and in some subjects through end of unit tests. However, it is at the end of each marking period (six times yearly) that the assistant principals use the data most frequently with teachers. Discussions focus on an examination of individual teacher's

¹ Small Learning Communities are frequently referred to as Academies.

class data, with some reference to individual students. The outcomes of Regents examination are also analyzed. However, whilst important, there is an over-emphasis on discussions about individual classes to the detriment of deeper and wider school analysis.

Early data from other schools helps determine groupings of students. Further analysis by the principal ensures that performance of special education and English language learners are monitored. However, while the school has performance data on the basis of gender and ethnicity it does not use it. The school generates its own data principally through teacher assessment, lesson observations and more recently, small research projects, which are beginning to highlight the value of generating and analyzing information. A case in point was the information acquired as a consequence of a case study comparing the learning profiles of two students. The school uses its individual student and individual teaching class data suitably well. However, other tiers of analysis are not evident. In addition, there is no consistency of approach regarding the expectations on teachers to use their own performance data of students in any meaningful way. In some areas teachers are acutely aware of the value of data and use it, but in others there is much less clarity and limited understanding of the value of interrogating data.

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 undeveloped.

The school has a clear set of goals, and these have been in place and modified slightly on an annual basis over the past three years. They are real and relevant goals central to the school’s development. However, apart from working to raise attendance, knowledge of these goals is weak across the cabinet and with mainstream teaching staff. Equally, there are lists of strategies to ensure the school works towards these goals, but the goals are not all written in a form that makes it easy to measure the extent of success. There is a need to generate stronger teamwork amongst teachers so that agreed procedures and goals can take shape. The academies have no agreed goal setting procedures identifying what is most important to them and building on the whole school goals. Therefore teachers in turn most often simply react to changes that occur on a week-by-week basis rather than holding with them a commitment to an action plan. The Empowerment Schools Initiative is providing a very good example of a research project to provide data about the effectiveness of specific approaches to the learning of a target group of students. One strength of this aspect of the school’s work is the knowledge gained of the progress of students most at risk and the scheduling and strategies employed to help such students. Specific support programs have been put in place, but in some instances, the weakness is the fact that too many of such students are too frequently absent.

Expectations by teachers of student learning vary across the school. Where expectations are high student engagement is very positive. The same pattern emerges where teachers make regular contact with parents about student progress and attendance. While the principal is clear about what he wishes to achieve on behalf of the students at the school, the goals and plans set are not sufficiently clear in the minds of all staff in a corporate and agreed way to effect significant changes. For example, all teachers know that a major school aim is to improve attendance, but there appears to be no agreed and unified approach as to the different ways in which this may be achieved.

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 selected a curriculum that satisfies the mandated requirements. In addition, there has been a move to three separate small learning communities to facilitate stronger links between students and their academy each with a slight vocational bias, either towards the arts (including graphic design), business and technology. Each academy has the capacity to generate its own performance data, and does so satisfactorily. However, the quality of use of such data varies across the school. Teachers are accountable for improving the quality of teaching, although some appear to embrace this goal much more readily than others. Teachers acknowledge that they not only have an academic responsibility, but are also have some responsibility for students’ personal and social development.

Teaching largely engages students, but rarely is it evident that there is any degree of differentiation to meet the variety of needs in each class. Differentiation is most frequently by outcome. Budgeting decisions are made on the basis of school needs. Several recent decisions by the principal have been a product of assessing students’ needs and devising strategies and re-scheduling to satisfy them. The programs are working suitably well. The staff knows and respects the students, and students know there are adults they trust and will talk with if they have issues of concern. Teachers prepare work in response to academic needs, but there is a variation of opinion regarding the extent and nature of differentiation that is most appropriate for teaching. Raising student attendance is a high priority for the school. It has been part of the school’s goals for several years although improvement has been slow. The school data records on absence are extremely thorough. The attendance team is aware of patterns of student absence and work constantly to make improvements. However, in the academies, different teachers have different approaches to the way they keep in contact with parents.

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.

There is an effective appointment process. A key factor is always that prospective teachers have high expectations and a commitment to promoting student achievement. There is wide variation in teachers understanding of the purpose of the school’s professional development program. The program follows the part of the school action plan which is specifically about improving instruction so that standards of achievement improve. However, the staff are not especially aware of this and they have not been involved in any process leading to conclusions about their professional development needs. The in-school program has focused on ways and tips to improve teaching, but has not been driven by either a need to raise staff understanding of how to use data, or the outcomes from data analysis. Teachers do value the opportunities they have to attend external courses.

The principal and assistant principals observe lessons frequently. Written reports outlining teaching and providing evaluative commentary on findings are included. The program is in part about ensuring that the senior staff know and understand the quality of teaching in their academy and through the school. Feedback is prompt and is suitably focused on

strengths and areas for improvement. Therefore there is a program of individual teacher development through feedback, but no use of this soft data to identify patterns of strength or weakness. Teachers rarely observe each other.

Planning of teaching frequently takes place in both subject and grade teams. Assistant principals who lead their small learning communities often refer to such meetings as professional development time. However, while there can be development issues, teachers more frequently recognize such meetings as working time to discuss and plan. The staff attending rarely receive an agenda before these meetings and therefore can do no preparation. Evaluation activities, with the notable exception of the Empowerment Schools Initiative, are rare. The action of teachers being involved with the revision of plans at academy level is equally rare because individual academies only work loosely to specific development action points. Staff work together and collaborate satisfactorily, but teamwork is not a strong feature of the school, because it is rare that teachers are given opportunities to work on key action points together. Even the essential development of rubrics within subjects proved to be challenging to the point that few are complete. The principal is respected, knows his school and the students well and has the capacity to improve the school. Procedures are generally clear and the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Support services and partnerships are strongly aligned around the school's academic goals to raise standards of achievement in the areas of study followed by 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 undeveloped.

Where plans exist there are no interim goals. The knowledge by staff of the key school goals for the school across the academies is very weak. They all know that attendance has to be improved, but the quality of the mechanisms for such improvement to occur varies widely. No academy is expected to produce a specific development plan for its own area, with the whole school goals integrated into their plan. Teachers are not involved in any discussion about school action planning, or even have to agree goals for individual subjects or grades. However, comparisons of student progress by class are well understood. Teachers for the most part, know the achievements of their students, but not always the best ways to aid their improvement. Where individual student needs are well known, for example, where they fail to gain the credits they require, intervention that will aid their learning is devised and explained well to students. At the end of marking periods, and especially after Regents examinations, the leaders of the academies talk with their staff about the cumulative statistics showing the pass and failure rates of students by class and subject. It is good that some general conclusions are drawn, but there is no culture across the academies of using statistical data analysis to any depth. However, the school honors class has arisen from such data. This class is a mix of the most able students per grade across the academies. There is little formal revision of plans arising from periodic assessments and therefore interim and final outcomes are not measured against any success criteria. However, the principal uses data to determine whether existing goals require modifications for the following school year. These goals are set and based upon the principal's drive for higher student achievement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Chelsea High School (High School 615)	∅	✓	+
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		