



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Life Sciences Secondary School**

**Intermediate School / High School 655**

**320 East 96 Street  
New York  
NY 10128**

**Principal: Genevieve Stanislaus**

**Dates of review: February 1 - 2, 2007**

**Reviewer: Jean Mackie**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Life Sciences Secondary School has an enrollment, covering grades 6 through 12, of 715 students who come primarily from East Harlem and Upper Manhattan. The population comprises approximately 52% Hispanic students, 39% Black students, 6% Asian and others and 3% White students. There are approximately 2% special education students and a further 4% who are English language learners. The proportion of students who have recently entered the country is slightly lower than that for similar and City schools. Those that have arrived are largely from Haiti, El Salvador and St Lucia. The attendance rate has improved recently but, at 84.7% in 2005, it was below the figure for both similar and City schools. The school was established in 1999 with a core purpose of attracting students interested in science as a career choice, particularly those traditionally under represented in the field of medicine. There was some initial discontinuity as the administration changed with two new principals in quick succession. The current principal has been in post since 2001. During the last few years the school has gradually expanded to include middle school students.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal is recognized by the whole school community as a dynamic leader with a clear vision for the school and its students.
- The school uses data well to track the performance of students and inform instructional programs.
- The school has high aspirations for both the academic success and personal development of all of its students.
- The curriculum is well aligned to the graduation requirements of the students.
- The school is a calm and orderly environment in which learning is a high priority.
- There is some effective instructional practice, which both challenges and engages the students.
- There is a strong collaborative culture within the school, with teachers eager to share ideas and evaluate practice.
- Professional development programs are well-embedded in the school.
- Relationships between adults and students in the school are positive, with mutual respect shown.
- Good opportunities are provided for internship to enable older students to experience a range of career possibilities.

### What the school needs to improve

- Provide more opportunities for accountable talk to ensure that all students are fully engaged in discussions.
- Build on the good practice in the school to ensure greater consistency in the recording and use of assessment data by teachers.
- Consider ways to present whole school data in a format that is more accessible to staff so that progress towards school goals can be more easily monitored.
- Monitor the implementation of the professional development program more systematically to ensure consistency of implementation and its impact on student outcomes.
- Refine the analysis of data so that comparison of performance across grades and classes can be more easily undertaken.
- Sustain the efforts to improve parental engagement in their children's learning, in particular with regard to regular attendance.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal has been the driving force in creating a school that is orderly, with mutual respect shown between adults and students and a strong focus on learning. Staff, students and parents all recognize the progress that has been made since her arrival. The principal, ably supported by her assistant principals, lead by example in having high aspirations for the students. Data is analyzed carefully to monitor performance and inform instructional practice. The curriculum is well aligned to both the middle school and high school graduation requirements. There is an increasing emphasis on developing the science and technology programs to reflect the vision for the school. The strong commitment to developing well-rounded individuals is evidenced through the extensive internship program which provides a good range of career experiences for older students. The staff are enthusiastic, being eager to discuss practice and try out new ideas. Professional development programs provide good support for teachers. Students value the commitment of the staff and feel able to approach adults if the need arises. The developments to date have led to improved outcomes for students but the school is not complacent and is determined to secure even greater success in the future.

### 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 data collected by the school enables it to establish a clear picture of the overall performance and progress made by its students. Trends in performance are noted, as is the comparison with similar schools. State and City test results are scrutinized carefully to monitor how well the middle school students are doing. The weaker performance in mathematics has been noted and steps taken to strengthen instruction have already resulted in improved outcomes. For high school students, Regents results are similarly tracked so that there is a clear understanding of the comparative performance in different subjects. Transcripts are regularly reviewed by the guidance counselor and cabinet to ensure that the students' credit accumulation is on track for graduation.

Students' achievement on entry to the school is used to identify special education students and English language learners so that appropriate intervention strategies can be planned for them. In addition, the school looks at raw scores so that students who are close to level boundaries can be also be targeted. The academic intervention team undertakes detailed analysis of the data of those students who have not passed their tests to explore reasons for failure and subsequent support strategies. Teachers record assessment outcomes of the students in their classes, but the range of systems used leads to variability in the degree of rigor with which progress is tracked.

The difference in performance of boys and girls was tracked and led to some single gender classes last year. On balance, the school found that outcomes were not significantly enhanced so has reverted to mixed classes, where learning is looking to be more secure

this year. The relative performance of different ethnic groups has also been noted but analysis is informal rather than formal at present.

The school recognizes that its current reliance on paper-based systems to analyze data makes it difficult to share whole school information with staff in an easily accessible way. It also hampers the school's ability to make quick comparisons of performance across grades and classes, although this does occur.

**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 high aspirations of the principal and the staff underpin the setting of goals and the actions required to meet them. Targets articulated in the Comprehensive Education Plan are appropriately based on previous performance and expectations for improvement.

The assistant principal, with overall responsibility for supervision, chairs the various departmental meetings so that past performance at subject level can be discussed and goals for the future established. The meeting structure facilitates effective collaboration so that there is a shared understanding between the subject teachers of what is to be achieved and how the goals are to be reached.

There are some good examples of the use of rigorous assessment practices being used to inform individual and group goals within the classroom. Electronic tracking, for example, shows not only how well the students are doing overall, but also how they have performed in different types of assessments. This helps the teacher to target both subject specific skills and examination techniques that require enhancement. The range of assessment systems means that the effectiveness of teachers in using the data to set suitably challenging goals is variable. Special education students, English language learners and students identified from the data as being at risk are set appropriate targets, with additional intervention programs established for them, where necessary. Regular meetings about these students enable systematic tracking of their progress towards the goals set.

Parents feel that communication with the school is good, with access to teachers via both direct contact and electronically. Newsletters, parent teacher conferences and report cards are helpful in providing information about the school's priorities and the progress of their children. The high expectations in terms of both work and behavior are known and appreciated. There is a recognition that middle school parents tend to be more closely involved with their children's education than high school parents and steps are being taken to tackle this. Students themselves value the aspirations that the school has for them. The vast majority are eager to do well and graduate successfully to college. Partnerships with organizations such as Columbia University, Mt. Sinai Medical Center and Hunter College strengthen the focus on continuing education.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school provides a carefully planned curriculum which meets the mandatory requirements for the middle school students and enables high school students to gain the required credits for graduation. The school has monitored the effectiveness of the curriculum on students' outcomes and made adjustments accordingly. The scheduling of the global and United States history programs, for example, was changed to provide greater continuity of experience for the students and results have improved as a consequence. Middle school students are provided with Regents style assessment in preparation for their forthcoming grades and the school also offers Advanced Placement courses for seniors.

Teachers are fully aware of their accountability for the achievements of the students in their care. They want their students to do well and use performance data regularly to inform their instructional programs. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge which often underpins some lively instruction, resulting in positive engagement from the students. On occasions, opportunities for greater differentiation through group work and accountable talk are missed and, as a result, some students are not as actively involved in the lesson as others. The school is a calm and orderly environment, in which students feel valued. They feel comfortable about approaching adults about any personal or academic issues that might arise.

In addition to careful scheduling, the school has also aligned its budget and staffing according to the needs of the students. The development of the middle school program has, for example, led to the appointment of more staff with experience to match the requirements of these grades.

Attendance is a high priority and is monitored closely in class, at whole school level and by grade. Procedures to follow up regular absentees and latecomers have resulted in improvements, with attendance now approaching 90%. The school is not complacent, however, and is working proactively to secure more engagement from parents, especially those with children in high school whose attendance is not as good as it should be.

**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 experienced principal is well respected by the whole of the school community for her drive and vision for the school. She is recognized as having developed a school where learning and respect for others are paramount. In doing this, she has been careful to select staff who share her vision and high expectations. Those that have found the changes too challenging have moved on. The principal has shown that she has good capacity to effect change.

Professional development is seen as the key to further improvements. The principal has retained a fulltime post to ensure that programs and workshops are closely matched to the priorities of the school and to individual needs, which are identified carefully through data

analysis and classroom observation. Departmental meetings provide good opportunities for teachers to use data to evaluate instructional programs and share ideas. In addition, well-attended lunchtime sessions facilitate further discussion across subject areas and grades. A range of external consultants provide additional expertise, in interactive classroom practices, for example. These opportunities, and the feedback from formal classroom observations by the administration, are received enthusiastically by teachers and, in many cases, implemented to good effect. Practice is inconsistent, however, as systems for monitoring the impact of professional development on classroom strategies and student outcomes are not formally embedded.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, with clear routines that are well understood and followed by the school community. The partnerships with the various academic institutions have proved constructive in developing a focus on further study and supporting the students in achieving college places.

**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 annual goals for the school are clearly identified within the Comprehensive Education Plan, which has been compiled by the school leadership team, ensuring that there is a broad understanding of what the expectations for students are and the actions required to achieve them. There is an extensive meeting structure, including faculty conferences, cabinet and departmental sessions, which facilitate the ongoing evaluation of progress towards the goals identified. The whole school data that is shared with the staff is not always presented in an easily accessible manner, however. The current system, which involves a great deal of paper, also limits the ability of the administration to undertake readily a strategic evaluation of progress towards goals set.

Guidance counselors monitor the progress of individuals carefully to ensure that they are on track to meet graduation requirements. The academic intervention team also scrutinizes data systematically to ensure that special education students and others at risk are working towards their targets. English language learners are similarly monitored. The variability in assessment practice means that, although students' progress in tests is recorded, some teachers do not always have enough information to identify specific weaknesses in either conceptual understanding or skills. As a result, it is more difficult for them to refine their instructional programs so that they meet fully the range of needs within the class. The school recognizes the need to establish greater consistency of practice in order to secure further improvement in student outcomes.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Life Sciences Secondary School (MS/HS 655)</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	