



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The School for the Physical City

High School 690

**55 East 25 Street
New York
NY 10010**

Principal: Junior Miller

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Reviewer: George Wallace

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School for the Physical City has 365 students in grades 9 through 12. Over 50% of the school population is in grade 9. The proportion of English language learners is 7% and 17% are special education students. The ethnic make-up of the school is 35% Black, 50% Hispanic, 9% Asian and 4% White. The school receives Title 1 funding with 75% of students eligible for free lunch, which is above the average for similar and City schools. Attendance is low, and at 81% is much lower than that for similar and City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides a very pleasant, safe, welcoming environment for students and sets the right tone for learning.
- There are good lines of communication in the school, especially between teachers and the principal who, together with the assistant principal, has an open access policy.
- The principal knows his school very well and this contributes strongly to the school's reflective and evaluative procedures.
- The school has a very well written action plan showing clear thinking about the strategies necessary to reach the goals set and drive up standards of achievement.
- The school has good systems and works hard to support those students at risk and in need of most help.
- Budgeting and staffing decisions are helping to drive the school forward in its pursuit of raising standards.

What the school needs to improve

- Generate and use student achievement data more consistently throughout the school.
- Develop and extend the curriculum so it provides a wide range of opportunities for all students to reach their potential.
- Ensure that all teachers are fully conversant with the aims and structure of all school goals and plans.
- Raise the overall quality of teaching. .
- Improve communication between teachers and parents and encourage greater parental involvement.
- Further develop strategies to improve attendance.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

The School of the Physical City is an improving school, but faces very challenging circumstances. The principal knows his school very well and has been able to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses accurately. In doing so a high quality action plan has been put in place which is a driving force for change. Teaching quality also varies too widely. Many teachers have welcomed the messages conveyed from their professional development program, a product of the principal's action plan, and indicate that it has had a positive impact on their teaching. Many teachers are using assessment data to track students' progress closely. In addition, there has been significant, but not total acceptance by all teachers, that it is every teacher's responsibility to improve literacy skills. Several teachers use their data to modify their approaches to teaching, identify new support required, including the bringing together of groups of students for intensive literacy support. However, such procedures and processes are inconsistent across the school.

The curriculum meets the basic mandated requirements and therefore students follow courses leading to Regents examinations. Even so, the curriculum is too narrow because there are few subject choices and there is little use of the external environment in a city rich with resources. Provision for physical education is also poor. The principal is highly visible around school. He has an open access approach to his work that is valued by staff and parents. However, communication between teachers and parents is weak. Although the school provides students with a very pleasant supportive environment in which to learn, too many students are absent and therefore overall attendance is low.

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 undeveloped.

The school generates a wide range of data arising from the way teachers assess their students' work. Particularly important has been the principal's recognition that students' literacy skills are weak and that standards are to rise in all subjects this has to improve. He instituted a program of training for all staff, and where the strategies presented through the training are being implemented, it is clear that improvements in standards are occurring. However, these strategies are applied inconsistently across the school.

Teachers with responsibility for special education students and those for whom English is a second language know the progress rates of their students well. Additionally, the principal, in his analysis of teachers' data and subsequent examination results, has recognized a weak correlation between the two sets of data. This has alerted him to the fact that there are clear anomalies with teacher assessment that requires attention.

Although the school population profile has changed enormously over recent years the administration recognizes that while standards are low, they are improving at grade levels and in most subjects. However, a full analysis of data in other ways does not occur. For example, there is no analysis of data by comparing the school's performance with other schools in similar situations. In addition the school does not analyze the relative performance of different groups by either gender or 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 undeveloped.

Almost a year ago, the school leadership team produced a good quality Comprehensive Education Plan which was focused student achievement in various subjects. The structure of the plan is extremely clear and includes a wide range of good clear strategies to bring about improvement. The plan also shows how progress will be measured and ultimately how successful the school has been in meeting its goals. This process is new to the school, and although professional development has occurred for the whole faculty, the response to training outcomes has been mixed and therefore success so far has only been partial. Additionally, not all members of staff have a copy of the plan, nor are they encouraged to periodically evaluate their work against the success criteria.

The school makes insufficient use of goals and plans for improving student performance. However, neither the Comprehensive Education Plan nor the more recent, highly relevant action plan drawn up by the principal is not shared with all staff or others and certainly not given a sufficiently high profile.

In several areas of the school's work, strong attention is given to supporting pupils most at risk. This includes those with very poor attendance who require intensive multi-agency support, as well as those in school who are given good quality support through specialist teachers. However, in too many cases, data is not used sufficiently well to identify students who would benefit from different tasks, or alternative ways to organize their work to aid their learning.

Teachers' expectations of pupils vary considerably. Where they are high, students work well and make suitable progress. However, in too many lesson teachers' expectations are low and therefore both the quality of teaching and of students' work is too low. Those parents involved with the school are not given sufficient information to become partners with the school in their children's learning. Parents feel that while the administration is accessible, it is much more difficult to arrange time to speak with teachers. In some areas of the school there are specific plans with goals showing ways to improve student performance. However, these are not applied consistently across the school and are not therefore sufficiently effective in driving up standards.

Data is analyzed and used extremely well by some teachers, but this practice is not consistent throughout the school. In some areas of the school, data is gathered to assess the progress and show the overall performance of students. In those circumstances teachers have a good understanding of the effectiveness of the learning of their students. For example, in science, an analysis of results showed that many students try to avoid answering questions that require higher order literacy skills.

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 undeveloped.

The principal and other staff have worked hard to re-align the curriculum from a purely portfolio program to one where students now follow courses leading to a regents diploma. The examination courses followed provide a wide variety of data which, when used well provide good information for teachers about student progress. The systems in place are effective, but not used by all teachers. The curriculum, while satisfying the basic mandated requirements, is not especially rich or broad. There is minimal use of outdoor facilities either for physical education or for academic purposes. No use is made of the school’s central Manhattan location to acquire business links and there are few electives.

Most teachers recognize that they have a responsibility for students’ well-being and academic progress. However, this recognition varies considerably across the school, from high quality assessment, planning and expectations of students to undeveloped thinking about teaching and student learning.

The school budget is used effectively to serve the interests of students. Of particular note is the way that finances are used to service the school action plan and therefore provide opportunities for teachers to widen their understanding of how students’ learn. Equally proficient are the staffing and scheduling decisions made to aid student learning. This is evident in the hiring of an additional guidance counsellor to support the student’s social and emotional needs and a part-time coach for social studies.

While there were several examples where students were well focused on their learning as a consequence of good teaching, overall, instructional programs do not engage students. Staff know and respect the students. However, their response to students’ academic needs varies widely. Students like their school and have adults they trust and can turn to if concerns arise.

Student attendance is low. There is a potentially useful system in place which includes teachers making direct contact with parents but this is not monitored properly and contacts are not made as frequently as required.

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.

New staff are selected on the basis of their commitment and drive to raising standards in a challenging school. The principal is well aware of the need for staff to think beyond subject instruction to find ways to motivate students and raise standards. As such, his action planning, and subsequent professional development program is good and well targeted, providing teachers with new and effective ways to manage their assessments, record, interpret and use data. The principal brings in experts to lead training and purchases physical and human resources to help teachers. Unfortunately, there is insufficient use of the plan, not only to inform staff of the priorities for this school year, but also as a highly effective tool to be used at grade and departmental level to aid thinking about ways to raise standards and to plan for the future.

The principal knows his school very well. He observes lessons frequently and, together with his assistant principal, is accessible to parents and staff. Their openness is very much valued by staff, students and parents alike. The principal, through his knowledge, reflections and action planning shows that he has the capacity to effect change. The school is in an extremely pleasant building and sets the right tone to aid student learning. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Procedures are known and generally followed, but communications between staff, including teamwork, is relatively weak. Partnerships in the community are few, but include good links with an architectural company which has provided some exciting activities for students. However, in the main, support services and partnerships that are aligned to the curriculum are undeveloped.

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.

School plans are not used to make interim judgments about the rate of progress the school is making towards its goals. The plans are of a quality that would allow such judgments to be made and the data available from some teachers could be used to see whether students are on track for success in their forthcoming Regents or not. In fact end of year analysis of data has allowed targeting of specific students to enhance their literacy skills, a program that is working successfully. However, neither the principal nor teachers are yet in the habit of making mid-year evaluations against their plans. The annual planning documents, while they are of a good quality and used to drive professional development, are not shared with teachers.

Teachers do provide end of marking period results for the principal and students, but these are not used to ascertain the school's progress towards its goals. However, where data is used well, teachers make requests to the school support teams suggesting that support is, or may be required for specific students. Several teachers also make comparisons of student progress in their classes to see what aspects of their teaching have been successful, what needs further attention and what may perhaps require a different approach. This form of analysis is new and not used by all staff. The principal has shown that he uses school data, together with personal observations, to make accurate and intelligent judgments about his school. Such analysis and evaluation led to the quality action plan. Although aspects of the strategies for improvement in the plan are modified, especially when they are being used as part of the staff professional development, the real potential of the planning document through its use with all staff remains untapped.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The School for the Physical City (HS 690)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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		