



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Newtown High School

High School 455

**48-01 90th Street
Queens
NY 11373**

Principal: John Ficalora

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Reviewer: Ken Bryan

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Newtown High School is a large culturally diverse learning community serving 3555 students from 9th grade through 12. The school is located in the most culturally diverse zip code in the city and there are 59 languages spoken. The school's capacity stands at approximately 157.9% which is significantly higher than similar and city-wide schools. The school's ethnic composition is 63% Hispanic, 24% Asian, 8% Black and 4% White. The proportion of students eligible for Title 1 funding is 27.5%, which is lower than similar and citywide schools. There are 184 special education students and 1174 English language learners. Most ELL students speak Spanish or Chinese. The student attendance rate is 78.2% which is broadly in line with similar and City-wide school averages but is falling.

Newtown High School is housed in an old, overcrowded building. The school offers three successful specialized programs; a business institute/new media/ e-commerce program, a pre-engineering/computer technology academy and an arts program. Many excellent examples of the student's art and design artifacts are to found in the hallways and many of the classrooms and workshops.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is highly visible, very well respected and provides excellent instructional and academic leadership.
- The cabinet is a very effective group which provides excellent support for each department and aspect.
- The school is data rich and gathers a wide range of information about students, grades, departments and groups to inform academic and personal progress.
- The school's diversity is managed very successfully through the use of its instructional programs and additional resources.
- The school functions very well on a day-to-day basis and it is a calm and purposeful learning community.
- The students are eager to learn and are self-motivated as a result of instructional programs which positively engage the students.
- The school has excellent in-built systems for collaborative planning, self-evaluation and review.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that data is used consistently by all members of the faculty to meet the needs of all groups of students through differentiation.
- Raise levels of attendance through improved vigilance and consistency and through greater parental involvement.
- Improve the provision for information technology for the faculty to enable them to communicate, log data and teach more effectively.
- Provide additional professional development to build capacity in gathering and aligning data to aid instruction.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well developed features.

Newtown High School is successfully meeting the needs of its very diverse learning community. The school is well-led by the highly visible and experienced principal and his excellent cabinet. Professional, academic and personal guidance is ably provided for the faculty and for the students in this thriving learning community that 'sets you up for life', according to one enthusiastic student.

The school uses data very effectively to set goals for all constituent areas of the school and it successfully meets the needs of its large special education and English language learner populations. The instructional programs are thoroughly planned and delivered by a highly committed faculty. The students are actively engaged in the learning process and there are many opportunities for them to receive further support. Relationships are strong and the school emphasizes the need for effective and sustained academic and personal guidance for all students.

The school has the capacity to address its challenges; to raise attendance through the adherence to consistent and vigilant processes and higher levels of engagement, to raise the status of technology for all members of the school and to ensure that data is uniformly and rigorously used by the entire faculty.

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 well developed.

The school very effectively gathers a range of student data and it rigorously sets challenging goals for individuals and sub-groups. The school generates data from numerous interim assessments, teacher determined diagnostic and formative tasks and from task-mastery rubric and guidance from each class. This systematic process is managed extremely effectively by the principal and his cabinet. Departmental leaders clearly demonstrate the capacity to interrogate data and the level of communication and dissemination is high. A very good example of this is the analysis of the January Regents results, which have been carefully disaggregated according to department and sub-group performance.

There is a clear, systematic approach to data management and interpretation and the cabinet team continually identifies trends and sets challenging goals. With the collaborative help of all staff, the cabinet is able to modify curriculum provision and the schedule through a very flexible arrangement. The analysis of performance of the many ethnic and special education sub-groups is a particular strength. There is a consistent data trail for English language learners, and special education students linked to data. The use of bi-lingual teachers, differentiated groupings, grade advisers and the scheduling support of the program chairperson ensures that the needs of all students are met.

The school is very adept at comparing year-on-year, grade, departmental and similar school performance. The assistant principals leading each department and aspect continuously and rigorously use scholarship reports to compare grade performance and the principal regularly compares with statistical neighbor/peer horizon schools. The school very carefully analyses data from other key indicators; attendance, suspensions, retention rates and the performance of the special programs (advanced placement classes and the specialized education programs).

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.

Using the available data, the cabinet and the faculty collaboratively set demanding goals which are measurable, are time related and are linked to a ‘living’ Comprehensive Education Plan. Each departmental action plan, determined by the outcomes from the data, feeds directly into the Comprehensive Education Plan and the school leadership team meets regularly to review progress towards the school’s goals. The school identifies and gathers data for its many focus groups. One such group is the large number of students who enter the school working below grade level performance (80%). The special education department works extremely effectively to introduce special academic intervention programs, assigning individual education plans and allocating the use of self-contained and collaborative team teaching classes. The school’s use of the special education teacher support services is particularly effective. Other effective programs meet the needs of the many ELL students. Bi-lingual and native language classes (in Spanish and Chinese) have been particularly successful. Very detailed goals involving the use of extended day classes are set to increase retention rates and the rigorous monitoring of individual student credit accumulation is another strong feature.

The school communicates its goals to the parents through a variety of means; phone calls, letters, consultations following interim assessments and through the formal report cards at the end of the six marking periods. Goals for improving student performance, based upon the available data, are well demonstrated by the use of mark and item analysis. Data is effectively disaggregated in English language arts, for example, and the departmental action plan is linked to the CEP. Data lies at the heart of this process.

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

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The curriculum is planned and aligned in accordance with the mandated City programs. The school, however, is extremely adept at modifying the approaches to instruction through the rigorous use of data. Curriculum maps clearly demonstrate the flexibility derived by the effective collaboration of the content area assistant principals and the faculty. Through detailed item analysis and the scrutiny of diagnostic interim assessments, the faculty is able to develop creative curriculum maps and pacing calendars. Teachers are held totally accountable for their differentiated teaching. The influence of the cabinet is

extremely strong in this respect as the content area specialists and the coaches are very pro-active in monitoring instructional practice. The guidance counselor is central to the embedded program setting process.

The principal and his cabinet are very creative with budget allocation. The budget is constantly adjusted to meet the needs of scheduling and professional development demands in response to student data. Very good examples of this are the creation of double periods in English language arts to meet the needs of the large population of students who arrive in the school performing below grade level, and the provision of advanced placement classes for the highest achievers. The level of engagement by the students is high. The students are very eager to learn and are self-motivated and the relationships between the faculty and the students are excellent. Despite the large school population, the teachers know their students and the quality of academic and personal guidance is high.

Student attendance is an extremely high priority for the school. Attendance rates are declining as a result of the high numbers of long-term absentees amongst the immigrant population and the numbers of students cutting class. The school has very rigorous procedures in place to challenge absence and to celebrate good attendance. Additional resources have been utilized to tackle the problem, such as the hiring of attendance teachers and the use of community based projects.

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.

Rigor, receptivity and collaboration lie at the heart of the teacher hiring process and Newtown High School. The principal and his cabinet actively seek teachers who are highly qualified, passionate about education, have the capacity to develop their understanding and use of data and are able to articulate high expectations. Teachers are required to be subject specialists but have the capacity to plan in an inter-disciplinary way. A good example is the cross-curricular approach to planning for music, architecture and mathematics. Differentiated professional development is given a high priority in the school. Programs are determined by student data and are planned collaboratively according to need. The ability of the cabinet to provide content and instructional support is excellent. Opportunities to turnkey information to the staff are frequent and are effectively delivered. Analysis of scholarship reports, the robust analysis of both QTEL (quality teaching of English language learners) and classroom data is collaboratively used to plan differentiated professional development for all staff. This is effectively augmented by frequent and regular classroom observations by the principal, content area assistant principals and by the subject coaches. There is a strong sense of peer support and collaboration within the faculty. Communication between faculty members is effective. For example, the meetings schedule is very thorough and the use a teacher-buddy system and frequent e-mails ensures that the entire faculty is on-message. Impromptu meetings often occur during common preparation periods.

The principal has the full respect of the teachers, the students and the parents. He is highly visible and demonstrates excellent instructional and academic leadership. Working with his excellent cabinet, he has the capacity to manage continuous and sustained improvement. The school is well organized and runs smoothly on a day-to-day

basis. The atmosphere within the crowded hallways and somewhat tired classrooms is purposeful and business-like.

The school has very well established collaborations and partnerships with numerous outside agencies and organizations such as the New York City writing project, QTEL for some professional development, community based organizations (CBOs) and other after school providers who significantly enhance the education of the students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Collaboration, effective communication and the very effective use of data lie at the heart of the school's self evaluation process. The school uses interim diagnostic assessments to inform its mid-year modifications to its goals and plans which are measurable and time-related. The grade data, content area statistics and Regents' outcomes are disaggregated using scholarship and item analyses. Consequently, rigorous evaluative and quantified judgments are made about the effectiveness of curriculum plans, periodic assessments and goals. Comparisons of student progress, grade performance and the relative progress made within content area departments are very effective. This intrinsically informs the personalized education plans for English language learners, special education students and other groups in need of remediation. A good example is the Regents' action plan, devised to set challenging goals for all students and based upon robust data analysis. Other modifications to the plans this year have been the introduction of double periods, additional extended day programs, the use of bi-lingual programs in Spanish and Chinese and the provision of advanced placement classes.

The school has an effective cycle of school self-review and planning. The process is embedded, intrinsic and authentic and involves all constituent groups. Departmental plans clearly demonstrate rigor and constant modification. A faculty member said that "nothing we do here is haphazard". All constituents of the school work with the school leadership team to create the constantly modified Comprehensive Education Plan.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Newtown High School (HS 455)	∅	✓	+
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