



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

High School of Computers and Technology

High School 275

**800 East Gun Hill Street Road
Bronx
New York 10467**

Principal: Bruce Abramowitz

Dates of review: November 2 – 3, 2006

Reviewer: Jan Lomas

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The High School of Computers and Technology is a new school formed just over two years ago. All students complete a four year computer sequence in addition to the academic program. The previous high school was reformed four years ago and there are now six schools on the shared site.

The school is growing incrementally and now has 332 students in year 9, 10 and 11. The school has its first grade 11 cohort in 2006-7. As enrollment grows the school population is changing. In the 2006-7 year there are larger classes in grade 9 because attrition in the upper grades has had to be made up in this cohort. The school population is now 75% boys and 25% girls.

The school received Title 1 funding for the first time in 2005-6. The proportion of students known to be eligible for Title 1 funding (76.4) is above the City and similar school averages.

Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds although the greatest proportion is Hispanic (56%). Thirty seven percent are Black while the remainder, about 7%, are from White and other backgrounds.

The number of students throughout the school who are identified as English language learners is small at present (23). The number of special education students has grown with this year's grade 9 cohort and this has more than doubled the number within the school overall (41).

The first year of reporting attendance data in this new school (2005) shows that attendance is at 90.2%, above figures for both City and similar schools. This figure dipped in December 2006 to 86.13%; however the school responded vigorously to this and reached 89.6% for the year overall.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is an inspirational leader who engages the commitment of all stakeholders in striving for success for all.
- The collaborative style of leadership is highly motivational and enables staff to contribute with zeal and confidence.
- Care for each student as a whole person is outstanding.
- The school has made clear progress in the ongoing development of systems and structures which allow for effective analysis and use of data.
- Teachers are held to account for improving student outcomes and achievements and are actively involved in developing strategies used.
- The school has developed effective procedures in order to improve rates of attendance and punctuality.
- Student voice and contribution is effectively engaged through the school council and student surveys.
- High expectations are conveyed to students and parents within a culture of support and acceptance of individual needs.
- The small numbers within the school means that the principal and staff know students well and this gives clarity and focus to all interventions.
- Bulletin boards in communal areas are used to good effect for students and staff alike to motivate, reinforce learning and disseminate good practice.

What the school needs to improve

- Broaden and develop data collection and its use in planning, monitoring and evaluation in response to the changing population of the school.
- Build the capacity of all staff to understand and make best use of qualitative and quantitative data to effect improvement.
- Develop better understanding and practice of the concept of differentiated instruction.
- Continue to develop staff confidence in the use of computers across the curriculum to enhance engagement and instruction.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school which has made good progress in establishing an effective learning environment since opening.

The High School of Computers and Technology has come a long way in a relatively short time. The culture of high expectations within a caring, student-centered culture pervades the school. The small school environment is used effectively to ensure that students, staff and parents feel known, valued, and encouraged. They speak warmly about the principal's ability to share his vision for the school and teachers are inspired by the consensual decision-making and collaborative approach which enables them to develop as professionals.

The sharing of the campus with other schools brings its constraints. Careful and flexible management is needed to ensure that the impact upon school development is minimized.

Students speak enthusiastically about the focus on computers and technology and are engaged and motivated by the opportunities afforded. The discrete technology curriculum is rooted within a rigorous academic program. Professional development, to enable all staff to use computer skills well across the curriculum, is an ongoing element of the school's work.

The principal has a clear and coherent view of the steps the school needs to take to develop further. Staff are eager to enrich the curriculum with a growing range of interdisciplinary projects that encourage students to use a kinesthetic approach and to understand links between learning areas.

The use of data and analysis is progressing well. However, some areas will understandably need more time to be fully developed, become established across the school and used effectively by all staff.

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 is beginning its third year since opening and has, for the first time, a cohort of grade 11 students. It has made valuable steps towards creating useful tools, sometimes alongside its partner, New Visions, to enable the principal and faculty to collect and analyze data and monitor progress. Teachers are supported in their effective use through discussion in grade teams and through professional development. Some tools are new and, whilst they are motivated to do so, it will take time for all teachers to feel confident and familiar with them.

All staff assess their students' achievements in a range of ways, formally through State and City tests and as well as through assessments devised by teachers to check progress

or achievement. Grade teams meet daily to discuss data, assessments and information arising from teachers' own observations of students. This is effective in leading to the timely development of appropriate academic interventions. Teachers also carefully consider how each individual student can best be supported personally to enable them to effectively access learning opportunities. They turn to guidance and specialist staff for support and intervention as needed. However, English language and special education staff also rotate through the meetings on a routine basis.

As the population of the school grows, the school has recognized the need to collect and consider data about emerging new groups. For example, staff have responded to the admission of a significant group of special education students in this year's grade 9 cohort. They have quickly set about identifying and assessing needs to enable appropriate intervention and support to be provided.

In these early years of the school's development, the focus has been upon developing the collection of performance and progress data for individual students and grades. There has been less opportunity, as yet, to analyze this data to give a picture of all discrete subgroups. For example, the school's priority has not yet been to look at data gathered about ethnicity or gender in this specific way.

It has begun to generate its own data to enable some comparison with other schools to add to that provided by the Annual School Report. However, the Report Card does not, as yet, include the full complement of data and, for example, school-generated comparative data for the new grade 11 is, naturally, limited. This means that the school's use of comparative data can only be undeveloped at this stage.

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 Comprehensive Educational Plan is developed by all members of the staff team working closely together. The goals are mainly clear and quantifiable and tasks specific and time-related. Planning is not always explicit about who is specifically accountable for overseeing particular elements and ensuring that all is on track.

The analysis and use of data to develop plans and interventions for individual students and for groups is a highly collaborative process within the school. Students are frequently invited to join discussions to contribute and to ensure that they are fully aware of expectations for their progress and the support they can expect to receive. Interventions for identified groups are often creative and involve staff working together to develop valuable strategies to accelerate students' learning. Key members of staff such as those who support special education, English language learners, literacy and mathematics are used flexibly to best support classes and individuals.

The frequent opportunities for teams to meet, coupled with professional development, mean that teachers are being supported to develop their use of data to effectively target students' needs in their planning. This is an area that the principal and teachers have rightly identified for further improvement.

There is a clear focus upon ensuring that students are making appropriate progress and whether they are 'on track', 'almost on track' or 'off track'. Appropriately, at this stage of this school's development, particular attention is given to those students who are struggling or who are most at risk of falling behind. The school is aware that it has not yet given emphasis to students who are making better progress but whose performance could still be improved.

Parents are encouraged to attend intervention meetings and to contribute to plans for individual students. The school works hard to involve and engage parents in supporting the aims of the school but response is variable. Computer classes for parents have proved popular and such initiatives help to support the whole family and bring parents closer to the school. Parents comment that teachers continually look for ways to include them. The open approach of the principal and all staff means that they feel comfortable when expressing concerns. Parents recognize that the school has raised students' expectations and commented that 'teachers care and all work together towards support and success for all.'

Students value the work of the school council and feel they are listened to and can influence the development of the school and the plans formulated to support their learning. One commented that the principal and staff 'make you feel comfortable and want to come to school every day'. They are aware of the opportunities to achieve success that the school affords them.

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.

Teachers feel accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes because of the open and developmental culture. Scholarship reports from the Department of Education are carefully discussed to focus all upon the impact of their teaching on learning. Professional support and development may follow, for example in the form of modeling by lead teachers or inter-visitation.

The principal and teachers are clear that a priority for professional development is the definition of differentiated instruction. Teachers are very aware of the importance of aligning instruction and daily planning in this way but there is further work to be done to build confidence and consistency.

Positive steps forward have been made to align the mandated curriculum with a sharp focus on achievement guided by data and professional observation. For example, there is an ongoing need to support reading and writing skills across the curriculum. Achievement in humanities is also a specific concern. A skilled English teacher has been paired with humanities teachers to support them in building reading and writing skills into their lessons. A teacher was able to exemplify enthusiastically how this had an immediate impact upon student performance in a humanities essay task.

In addition, the school has begun to develop cross curricular projects to encourage excitement and engagement. The school is eager to continue with these developments and to embark upon a mapping exercise to ensure the coherence of all elements of the curriculum.

The school plans to further integrate the use of computers and technology across the curriculum to enhance instruction and student engagement. Many teachers are comfortable with using computers in their teaching, but this does not extend to all and further training is needed. The target is to ensure that all teachers are using technology in 40% of their lessons by January 2007. Alongside this is the need to equip additional classrooms as the school grows.

Extra-curricular activities are used well to support student achievement as well as providing opportunities for students to get to know staff. For example, a quilting class enabled a teacher to support mathematics teaching by building in measuring activities to meet learning gaps for specific students. As this is a small school, staff know students very well indeed and, in turn, students feel cared for and encouraged.

Decisions about teacher and student time and the budget are all focused appropriately upon needs analysis and student performance. Effective and varied use is made of the schools' partners as a resource to support the curriculum and instruction.

Student attendance and punctuality is a high priority and planning to maintain and capitalize upon the very positive improvements already made is detailed. The school is aware that procedures need to be continually adapted to address issues which arise from the growing student population. For example, in September of this year records showed that there were over a hundred incidences of lateness being recorded on some days. By early November the figure had already been reduced to about ten incidences a day due to the focused interventions and rapid response of the school.

The principal is keen to ensure that all students have an adult with whom they feel 'connected'. Students express themselves at ease about asking for any help and comment, 'we have a voice.' They display work attractively in the communal areas and this is highly valued by students and staff alike.

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 well developed.

The principal has extended the culture of the school to the selection of new staff. Teachers assist in drawing up criteria for new appointments, watching demonstration lessons, and feeding back their perceptions to the principal. This active involvement engages staff commitment in the development and support of new colleagues. The principal includes attitudes towards and experience with data in his discussions with applicants.

Professional development is embedded within the culture of open discussion and collaborative planning. Discrete weekly sessions focus upon priorities within the Comprehensive Educational Plan and on expressed staff needs arising from data and observation. The principal has usefully identified the need to undertake an evaluation of the structure of the program in the coming year.

The principal visits each classroom daily and this provides opportunities to talk about issues that arise with individual teachers. Because of this he knows his staff well and has a very detailed knowledge of their strengths and areas for development. Staff and principal engage in useful discussions at the beginning and end of the year to agree plans

and later to agree successes and any obstacles. Formal observations take place appropriately as mandated but are seen by the principal as generally less helpful. The assistant principal is at present involved in training for formal classroom observation.

Meetings are structured so they are valuable in providing opportunities for mutual support and to ensure the rigor and effectiveness of the drive towards improvement. Teachers, whether experienced or new to the profession, are being developed as reflective practitioners.

The principal is highly respected and his informal style and supportive approach is appreciated. He has a sharp and coherent view of the development needs of the school. Teachers express the view that the principal shares responsibility and that he is 'very good at putting teams together 'to lead people forward. The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis. Teachers were proud to say that students 'don't want to go home at the end of the day.'

The school utilizes a range of partners to support extension of the curriculum and student achievement. An example of this is the robotics work and other summer school and after-school programs for technology skills run by Vision Education. Such work is carefully monitored and evaluated by the administration to ensure that input is having a positive effect upon students' achievement. For example, the school identified a group of nine students whose rate of achievement was very low. These students were invited to attend a summer school where a technology skills program was devised to secure their interest. 'Pull-out' support was also provided to address specific learning gaps. When reassessed, seven of these students had made significant progress and were 'back on track'.

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.

Priorities for the Comprehensive Educational Plan are established through a joint exercise with all teaching staff. The objectives are reviewed and revised on a twice yearly basis before making a summative evaluation which leads to further planning.

Teachers know their students well. They are very willing to try new initiatives and to flexibly revise plans for individuals and groups in response to data, assessment and observation. The principal and teachers have been proactive in beginning to develop creative ways to forge links between subject disciplines and to support the hands-on, student-centered approach. They are willing to try out these new projects and to revise and refine thinking to better meet goals. An example of this was a project that was tried to enable links between the use of computer and English language arts skills. Colleagues found that the initial focus was not working well and had the confidence to change direction. The resulting project was successful when reviewed against the skills-based objectives. This demonstrates that staff evaluate the school's work candidly and are willing to persevere in order to take the school forward.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: High School Of Computers And Technology (HS 275)	∅	✓	+
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	