



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**PULSE: Providing Urban Learners Success in
Education**

**High School 319
560 East 179 Street
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Carol Wiggins

Dates of review: May 10 - 11, 2007

Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

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

Providing Urban Learners Success in Education high school, known as PULSE, is a Diploma Plus high school located in the Bronx. It is one of four Diploma Plus high schools within the City's alternative school program, serving students from grades 9 through 12. The 129 students travel from all five boroughs to reach the school. Six percent of the students are English language learners and 5% are special education students. Fifty seven percent of the students are female and 43% male. Thirty seven percent of the students are Black, 59% Hispanic, 4% Asian and other groups. Eighty four percent of the students are Title 1 eligible.

All students transferred to the school from large high schools and were well below the requirements for graduation. Places at the school are sought after, with insufficient available for all the students who wish to apply. Students enter with low achievement and scheduling enables them to achieve credits towards graduation at an accelerated rate. Cohort groups are based upon individual student learning needs, rather than grade levels. Students' previous attendance was low and spasmodic but overall attendance at the school now stands at 75%.

The school occupies three floors of a school site with a program from a general education high school on the other floors. The open-plan instructional areas are spacious and separated from each other by screens. There are no doors or solid walls between classrooms. The school uses facilities at Bronx Community College each Friday to allow students to have some access to physical education spaces and science laboratories.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal conveys high expectations to all students and has established a supportive structure that encourages them to achieve graduation.
- The school provides a caring and supportive environment, where students are attentive in classes.
- Students are polite, respectful and considerate to each other and adults in the school.
- The school has successfully challenged students' low attendance and continues to seek ways to improve this further.
- Students' families are encouraged to be active partners in learning and are well informed and supported by the school.
- A range of working partnerships enhances the curriculum and learning opportunities for students.
- The school knows students well, through formal and informal assessment information and personal observations.

What the school needs to improve

- Organize data from different sources into more readily accessible formats.
- Present data so that it can be understood by non-professionals.
- Compare data to highlight similarities and differences in instruction and learning.
- Extend the use of technology for both instruction and learning.
- Ensure that Comprehensive Education Plan goals relate to the school's priorities, are measurable and have specific interim milestones.
- Monitor the impact of interventions, professional development and actions routinely and use this to influence changes to plans and actions.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

PULSE high school is led by a strong principal committed to raising students' achievement and helping them to overcome negative influences and low academic records. The school's focus of learning and graduation is clear. Great efforts are put into supporting students to learn, overcome earlier experiences of education and move on to work and college. One student stressed, "We're all here to do one thing – learn." They are proud of their high scores and achievement.

The school has a compact site and with small numbers each student is known personally by every member of staff. A wide range of data is gathered on every student, but this is not organized in a unified way and comparisons are little-used as tools for gaining further information. Data is used to identify areas of weakness, short-term goals and changes needed in intervention and support. However, there is less evidence of long term planning. Teachers are attentive to students' needs and work hard to deliver programs that match these. Family involvement and support is a strength of the school. Teachers are committed to improving their practice and professional development is established across the school. Monitoring and revision of plans of student progress through each instructional cycle is well established. This is less so with whole school plans.

The school's self-evaluation was made using the five overall quality statements. The principal agrees that the outcome of the review reflects the school accurately against the sub-criteria.

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 knows all its students well, through formal and informal assessment information, personal interaction and observations. The small site and student numbers mean that every student is known as an individual. Initial information gathering starts with the application when students' previous academic transcripts are supplemented by diagnostic tests in mathematics, reading and writing. This information is used to allocate students to particular cohort groups. All subject teachers maintain well-organized portfolios of student work which show progress during each ten week marking period. The emphasis is on hand-written work and portfolios give limited information on work produced using technology. Information on academic progress and performance, attendance, guidance and work placement is held separately and is not organized to give an overall picture of a student. Bringing information together is time-consuming and does not always mean that all information is used fully in making decisions.

Information on how students are progressing is recorded and displayed in each class area. Information on progress against competencies is shown for each student but this is not pulled together to show progress for different cohort groups. Students make little

contribution to compiling their own records of progress and their personal laptop computers are not used for data collection or presentation.

The school takes pride in treating every student as a unique person and keeps detailed records on each of them. Two English language arts teachers are licensed to teach English as a second language and they respond promptly to issues and concerns highlighted from data on these students. The school maintains full information on the identified special education students and those who are above the age for special education referral.

Using the records of the competency model for instruction in different subjects, the principal seeks evidence to show that skills are being transferred across subjects. There is no process to compare the progress that students make over time, so the school cannot identify rates of progress and trends in data. The school is relatively new so there is little historic data to be used for comparisons.

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 school has high expectations for all students with the goal for all students to achieve graduation. The nature of the student population means that planning is at an individual rather than class or grade level. Plans are not defined in specifically to show what students need to improve. This information is available from the data gathered on students, but it is not analyzed to show this.

Each student has an individual learning plan binder, where some information on students is stored. This is not yet fully used as a comprehensive plan that shows each student what they need to participate in, achieve and master in order to graduate. The principal makes great effort to analyze data and scrutinize student work, which has enabled her to identify a weakness in grammar that led to low test scores in English language arts for all students. Focused intervention through ‘grammar clinics’ was successful, as Regents test scores in English language arts increased to 86%.

All staff place great importance on establishing and sustaining effective partnerships with students’ families, not just parents. The school keeps them well informed about school life, student progress, successes and any concerns. Progress letters are sent home at the five week mid-point in every instructional cycle. Events at the school attract high numbers of families, often family members from more than half the students’ families attend. The school recognizes and values the contributions families make to the school and students and these are celebrated with special awards to them. The school sees supporting families as an extension of supporting the student, often helping the whole family to move forward. The parent co-coordinator works hard to ensure that parents understand the information they receive, particularly the academic transcripts showing test scores achieved and credits still to be achieved. This is also because data is not presented in ways that make it easily understood by non-professionals. Senior students play a major role at their end of year review meetings and would like to make similar contributions throughout their school career and at more frequent intervals.

Formal involvement of the Learning to Work staff in defining plans and monitoring progress against these is also limited to an annual meeting. Opportunities to align goals and use work preparation to practice and apply academic knowledge are at an early stage.

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.

School days are organized into four periods each of 80 minutes and an initial 30 minute ‘check-in’ session, this is under-used instructional time. The structured 80 minute blocks allow intensive work so students achieve credits at an accelerated rate. The facilities at Bronx Community College are well used to compensate the lack of practical science and library facilities at the school site. There is no music or physical education at the school. High importance has been placed on technology and every student has a laptop computer at the school. Students are confident in using laptops, but sampling of portfolios, observations and discussions during the review indicates that they could be used more fully to complete work.

The principal holds teachers to account by routinely gathering portfolios and examines these to ensure that teachers address the individual needs of students and implement agreed frameworks for instruction. Data is used to monitor student progress, rather than setting small targets for students to strive for. Teachers plan on a cycle-to-cycle basis, which does form part of an overall plan.

Spending decisions take the local environment and resources available to students fully into account. Students are provided with duplicate texts and materials so they can learn at home, without increasing the risks to their personal safety by carrying bags through potentially unsafe areas.

The small number of teachers means they are flexibly allotted to classes and individual staff work hard to provide instruction and opportunities so students can improve. The open-plan arrangement means that the principal is quickly aware of student behavior and any disengagement with classes.

Students take responsibility for managing their behavior and negative attitudes. They are well behaved to each other and adults and show high levels of co-operation and engagement in most classes.

The school makes clear to students the importance of attending school and is effective in changing previous patterns of poor attendance. Many students have complicated lives outside school and the school makes every effort to address these with students to minimize the impact on attendance and learning. Little activity is evident in the first session of each day, which is unstructured and does not motivate students to arrive at school promptly.

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 principal hired all the staff and uses the criteria for master teachers to evaluate applicants for every post. Information is not sought on how potential staff use data to plan instruction and evaluate student progress.

Professional development is planned into the school schedule with teachers evaluating student work and identifying areas to address with an external coach. Staff receive factual verbal and written feedback promptly following observations by the principal. These identify strengths, where teachers have improved and areas to be improved. The principal ensures that weaker areas are being improved, by making these the focus of subsequent observations. Where observations highlight continuing under-performance the principal applies staff procedures consistently so the individual concerned is aware of the implications of their actions.

Staff share their expertise spontaneously and frequently observe each other as part of planned learning. They value this as part of their professional development. Sharing good practice through observing staff at other Diploma Plus schools is not part of sharing practice. Staff use their common planning time well to review student progress and short-term instructional plans, making changes that reflect the needs of the students. They value the support and recognition they receive from the principal and show high commitment to her vision for the school and its' students. The principal works well with the supportive teaching team and adaptable office staff to run the school effectively. Students clearly value the school and what is, for many, their first experience of a safe and secure learning environment and they concentrate on learning and show progress.

The school has working partnerships to enhance the program and support students in preparing for work or college. For example, links with Time Warner provide multi-media education and the Learning to Work staff help students to obtain paid work experience. These allow them to take responsibility for themselves and others and to learn and apply a wider range of skills beyond class-based instruction.

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.

The school's over-riding goal is that every student should be able to graduate and at the end of each ten week cycle, staff routinely review each student's progress towards this. Appropriate changes are made so that weaker subject areas are strengthened, as seen through the grammar clinics for English language arts. Progress is less formally reviewed half way through each cycle so that all changes necessary can be made promptly. At this level actions are monitored and revised. As a student has no overall plan for their time at the school, reviews currently are carried out on the short-term cycles. There is no medium-term planning that integrates the short-term cycles into long-term planning. Progress is less evident in the work and college preparation program, where the feedback students and their supervisors provide on each placement is not used to monitor or evaluate progress.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is a stand-alone document that does not influence the day-to-day life of the school. The goals in the plan are defined and relevant, but do not relate to the school's actual priorities. The annual review of the Comprehensive Education Plan goals does not indicate rigor in monitoring. Currently, the process for the principal's performance review is not used sufficiently to monitor strategic goals and plans.

The principal has recently started a self-evaluation process for the school to strengthen monitoring. She has recognized the need to identify the impact of all actions and interventions in terms of the difference being made to students' learning. This includes the academic and Learning to Work programs.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: PULSE High School (HS 319)	∅	✓	+
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		