



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The School for Inquiry and Social Justice**

**Intermediate School 337**

**1025 Morrison Avenue  
Bronx  
New York 10472**

**Principal: Andrea Cyprys**

**Dates of review: October 19 - 20, 2006**

**Reviewer: Cheryl Baker**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Intermediate School 337, The School for Inquiry and Social Justice, is a grade 6 through 8 school with 257 students on roll. White students represent 1.5% of the population; Blacks 41%, Hispanics, 55% and Asians and others make up approximately 2%. English language learners make up approximately 3% of the population and just over 14% are special education students. Attendance in 2005, at 93%, was broadly average for similar and City-wide schools

The school began in September 2004 with grade 6 and has added a grade in each subsequent year, reaching its current status as a full middle school in September 2006. The school is housed in a larger middle school and occupies half of the first floor and the entire fourth floor. New students, teachers, support and administrative staff have been added each year. The founding principal remains a significant force in the evolution of The School for Inquiry and Social Justice.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Staff set clear expectations and consequences for student behavior.
- The school engages in rigorous hiring practices to ensure that all personnel are highly skilled and are committed to the mission of the school.
- The administration sets clear expectations for teachers in the delivery of instruction and their responsibility to participate in the life of the school.
- Instruction is monitored with regularity.
- The principal provides strong leadership for continued school improvement.
- The school provides a safe, supportive school culture in which students feel respected.
- The school successfully portrays its image and culture within the context of a shared school environment.
- Staff enforce clear procedures to ensure that the school runs smoothly.
- They capitalize on the school's small size by knowing each student well.

### What the school needs to improve

- Empower the new cabinet to become a leadership team that drives school improvement efforts by giving voice to all members of the school community.
- Continue to develop processes and procedures for gathering, generating, analyzing and using data to make decisions, especially regarding curriculum and instruction.
- Continue to provide professional development in data analysis, differentiated instruction, classroom management, portfolio assessment and co-teaching.
- Continue to increase the alignment of after-school programs with student's academic goals and work to increase the number and variety of extracurricular offerings available to all students.
- Continue to refine the use of interim assessments so that results are routinely diagnostic and prescriptive.
- Promulgate the expectation that school, classroom, academic, and individual student plans undergo regular periodic review and revision based on all of the available data.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school.**

The school is in its third year of operation. Having completed its initial growth phase, it is now poised to focus all of its energy on refining its practices with respect to the use of assessments and data to drive instruction and decision making. The principal has a clear understanding of the steps the school needs to take to improve.

### 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 has leadership and practices in place with respect to gathering and using data. These are increasingly used by administrators and teachers to understand what each student knows and is able to do. Results of City and State tests are used to gain an overall understanding of the progress of the school and its students, and are communicated to all staff by grade level, content area and the proportion of students at each achievement level. The school recognizes that it has decreased the percentage of students scoring in level 1 since its inception and is focused on moving more students into levels 3 and 4. To support this goal, results are further analyzed to identify students in each classroom scoring near the threshold for each level so that teachers can target instruction to help them reach a higher level during the next testing cycle.

Test scores and other data are not routinely analyzed for differences among ethnic, racial or other sub-groups and the school is just developing a program to address its English language learner population. State test reports inform placement of students into instructional settings.

To gain information about each student's base-line knowledge, teachers administer pre-tests to determine the learning levels of their students in all content areas. These tests are standardized across each grade and class, providing an opportunity to analyze student performance across a grade or content area. The school is working with the interim assessment provider to align the sequence of tested strands to increase the quality of the data resulting from those assessments. Further, the school continues to refine and define the contents and expectations for student's portfolio assessments to increase the usefulness of these documents in analyzing incremental progress.

The school compares its performance on State and City tests with other middle schools and can produce data showing annual scores of students in mathematics and English language arts. Due to the small size of the school, comparison of student scores across classrooms, grade levels and academic areas is commonplace and the performance levels of all students at a grade level is well understood by all of the teachers of that grade.

**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 as a whole is increasing the practice of regularly using data to understand each student’s next learning step and to set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating learning. During the process of developing the Comprehensive Education Plan parents, teachers and school administrators set annual goals for learning that are based on the data from local, City and State assessments as well as the special needs of a school that continues to grow. The current document expresses yearly goals for increasing achievement in the tested areas and monthly meetings of the school leadership team include discussions of progress towards reaching these goals.

For special populations, such as special education students, individual plans and interventions are planned by teams of specialists and monitored according to regulations. The student support team meets on a weekly basis to review specific cases and to plan for interventions. Anecdotal and objective data inform the decision-making process.

At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, the school formed the pupil personnel committee. This group is an outgrowth of the academic intervention services program with a responsibility for instituting a structured pre-referral process and for providing support to students in need who fall outside of other identified populations. These students are instructed in general, collaborative team teaching, and special education settings.

Opportunity for Regents testing helps to set high expectations for students’ achievement. Students are assigned homework every night and the school’s grading policy sets out high expectations for academic achievement, attendance and attire. Student achievement and attendance are recognized through the honor roll and certificates of perfect attendance. Monthly programs are planned to provide parents with the information necessary to help their children to succeed.

In order to provide standards-based, incremental measures of student progress towards promotion, the school is refining the format of individual student portfolios which are required in every content area. In addition to formalized portfolios, teachers routinely keep folders of student’s work and some keep journals describing student’s progress.

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

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

The school’s curriculum is aligned with State and City mandates. Mathematics teachers use Impact Math and teachers of English language arts use Ramp-Up to Literacy. These content areas are each supported by part time coaches who provide professional development, work with individual teachers and provide individual and small group instruction to students. State standards guide instruction in the remaining content areas.

Teachers are expected to differentiate their instruction based on their understanding of what students know and are able to do as reflected by the analysis of their performance on

standardized tests and local assessments. While flexible grouping and lessons employing large and small group instruction support this goal and serve to engage students actively in learning, teachers express a desire for explicit training in techniques for differentiating instruction. With respect to accountability for student performance, the administration has not set specific expectations for student improvement at the class or grade level, but does communicate clear expectations to teachers with respect to the quality and alignment of their daily instruction. The principal routinely checks teachers' lesson plans to verify alignment.

The use of student assessment data to drive budgetary, staffing and scheduling decisions remains a goal. The growth of the student body in general has driven the school's decisions to date. The annual expansion of the educational program has informed decisions relative to staffing, scheduling, facility use, and materials and equipment acquisition. One full grade has been added to the school each year since 2004. Staff and programs have grown and changed with the student body. For example, an increase in special education students required the institution of the collaborative team teaching and self-contained classes. The presence of English language learners has driven the development of a program to meet their specific needs. The school's first eighth grade brought the need to provide access to Regents testing, the growth of the guidance department and expansion of the physical setting.

As the student body and staff have grown, relationships among and between teachers and students have strengthened. Teachers routinely reach out to provide extra help or personal support to students and they know the student body well. Students report feeling that there are many adults to whom they can turn for help, beyond those whose roles dictate responsibility for student well-being. These include individual teachers, the parent coordinator and the principal.

Attendance rates, which increased to 93% for the first month of the 2006-2007 school year, are close to City-wide expectations, although the school remains vigilant with respect to reaching out to parents of students not regularly attending school.

**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.**

Teachers are hired based on the areas of vacancy, their licensure and commitment to working with the school's population. The principal expects her staff to 'go above and beyond' and to take responsibility for the life of the school beyond their classroom. Candidates are hired by committee and are required to teach a demonstration lesson for the principal, students and teachers. Commitment and capacity to use data to analyze progress, revise plans, or compare outcomes across classrooms and schools is not part of the current hiring criteria.

To date, many of the professional development topics have been determined by the principal in consultation with the coaches and selected staff. Literacy has been a strong focus for all staff, regardless of their teaching assignment. Beginning in September 2006, the principal formed an administrative cabinet for the purpose of informing school-wide decisions, including the focus of professional development. Utilizing data from the analysis of students' academic performance and discussions about needs of a young and

expanded staff, training in data analysis, classroom management, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction is being planned for the 2006-2007 school year.

The principal is respected by staff, students, parents and teachers. She visits classrooms on a daily basis and performs brief informal observations, followed by brief feed-back conversations several times each month. Formal evaluations are conducted as required by contract. Teachers meet daily during common lunch periods to support one another's teaching, discuss individual students or receive directed professional development from the principal or coaches. Inter-visitation is not a formalized practice in the school and teachers new to the profession do not have a formal structure to support their induction.

The school climate is orderly and businesslike. Routines and expectations for behavior are clear. The school is highly organized and runs smoothly. Adults and children greet one another with formality and courtesy.

In addition to mandated extended day activities, the school partners with the New York Junior Tennis League to provide after-school activities. Students, parents and administrators indicate that the program has yet to meet its obligation to provide support services that relate to stated academic goals.

**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 communicates student progress through report cards and parent-teacher conferences. The school analyzes the overall progress of students on State and City tests; however analysis of group achievement is not fully developed. This impacts on student performance as work and instruction is not matched carefully enough to respond to their specific needs. The school has instituted expectations for formalized measures of student's entry level knowledge and is refining methods for increasing incremental checks of student progress through interim assessments and portfolios.

The school is moving towards using information contained in the available data to devise plans with measures of progress aimed at driving student achievement. The school is formalizing the practice of comparing student progress within and across classrooms and is generating item analysis data to help teachers modify and differentiate instruction. These practices are however not fully in place and have not begun to impact on student performance.

The new cabinet and pupil personnel committee are structures that offer the potential for formalizing practices with respect to using discrete data to devise improvement plans for groups of students and for individual students, regularly measuring the success of these plans and revising the plans as necessary.

The school leadership team with its responsibility to use the Comprehensive Education Plan as a driving force in measuring, guiding, and revising school improvement measures is a potential force for demanding more regular, incremental evidence of progress in meeting the school's annual improvement targets.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The School for Inquiry and Social Justice (IS 337)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X	

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>	X		