



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Community School for Social Justice

High School 427

350 Gerard Avenue

Bronx

NY 10451

Principal: Sue-Ann Rosch

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Reviewer: Mike Sutton

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school is in the south Bronx and has 369 students enrolled from grade 9 through 12. Most of the students live locally. Around 61% are Hispanic, 37% Black, and 2% are from other ethnic groups. There are 16% special education students, which is high for City schools. Most students speak Spanish as their main language but the proportion of students at early stages of learning English is low at 5%. Around 96% of students have Title 1 entitlement, which is much greater than for similar schools or City schools generally. Attendance is at 82%, which is broadly in line with the City school and with similar schools.

The school is an Empowerment School. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

The school opened in September 2002 and occupies the same building as one other school, sharing a library and cafeteria.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is exceptionally well lead and managed by the principal and has established an excellent climate for learning where all students can flourish.
- The highly dedicated teachers, assistants, administrative and support staff work very well in teams and go to enormous lengths to help students succeed.
- The family advisory structure enables staff to know every student extremely well academically, socially and emotionally.
- The students feel safe and always have someone whom they can trust and turn to for help or advice.
- The school has a strong focus on continuing self-development and improvement.
- The school makes good use of data to follow students' progress
- The curriculum is well designed and meets the needs of the students.
- The school uses an imaginative program for students with particular behavioral issues, to enables them to succeed and make progress towards graduation.
- The school has developed an excellent productive partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- There are well-organized routines and consistently implemented procedures, which ensure the school runs very smoothly.

What the school needs to improve

- The school should continue with plans to introduce courses that are more advanced, to meet the needs of the higher achieving students.
- The school should rationalize its systems for collecting and analyzing data and continue to explore in greater depth, potential patterns in achievement for some particular groups of students.
- The school should ensure that all plans contain equally clear and precise targets for improvement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The school has a clear philosophy and well-understood aims. It achieves these through exceptional leadership and clear management. It gathers a wide range of data on students' achievements, which it communicates, well to key staff. The teachers use the family advisory sessions extremely well to gain a detailed understanding of the academic and personal needs of every student. This quickly identifies their specific needs and adjustments to programs follow. There is excellent support from the school's team of counselors and assistants. Teamwork is a strong and consistent feature at all grade, subject and management levels.

The curriculum is well designed and adjusted regularly. The teaching is thoroughly well planned and it engages the students' interests. The 'Hallwalk' program devised by the school is an innovative and very successful approach to ensuring continued education for students at risk of disaffection from school or with challenging patterns of behavior. The help and assistance for the special education students is particularly effective. There is outstanding support from the school's main external partner, which helps provide internships, study support and advice and guidance when applying for college.

There are rigorous systems and procedures covering all aspects of the school's work. These are consistently applied. There are high levels of mutual trust and respect between everyone at the school. The combination of trust, consistent procedures and well-designed programs of work ensures an excellent climate for learning in which students have the best opportunities to succeed.

The school has a clear focus on continued development. Its planning is coherent and sets out helpful markers to gauge progress in most areas. The school has identified the need for more demanding courses now it has a full compliment of students and grades. It keeps a careful check on students' progress but there are several data systems in use, which do not all present the same information, or in equally accessible and usable ways.

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 gathers a wide range of data from formal and informal assessments of students' achievements. Teachers use quizzes and assignments to provide a constant update about the progress which individuals make. The school's program of presentations by students to demonstrate their learning has well designed assessment structures. The progress of special education students is also followed carefully and the school ensures that it gathers data on prior achievement for these students as quickly as possible when they start at the school. This allows for accurate and precise planning of programs of work to assist these students.

The school looks critically at the full range of information which it has available. This information covers the results of formal interim assessments and end of year examinations. These are analyzed by subject and grade as well as at class level where appropriate. The results from the end of each marking period are also examined. The subsequent analysis provides school leaders with a clear picture of the school's overall performance as well as detailing the outcomes of specific areas. The school looks carefully at the achievements of male and female students in many aspects of its work. It does not explore potential differences by ethnicity to the same depth. The progress of English language learner students is checked individually as numbers are too small to be of wider statistical use.

The school uses different spreadsheets in different formats to analyze data. This often means that it is not possible to easily analyze information using the same variables, hampering a consistent approach.

The school uses its data to make internal comparisons between grades, subjects and classes but there is insufficient external data available at present for wider checks on the school's performance. Because it records all data carefully and constantly challenges itself to do better, the school is very well placed to make use of year-on-year comparisons with other schools.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student is next learning step. Through collaborative planning, 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 well developed

Making good strategic use of information on students' progress is the school's highest priority. It sets clear targets for success rates at grade and class level and for graduation. It checks at regular intervals and knows, for example from interim assessments, which targets are on track and which need more attention. It uses such information to make prompt adjustments as for instance, in some aspects of mathematics for the senior grades.

The school puts the detailed knowledge, which it has for each student to very good use. Through family advisory meetings, teachers keep a very careful check on the academic and social progress of individuals. The school has excellent systems for recording and sharing students' successes across classes and grades to ensure that all key people know what is happening. Teachers keep regular contact with parents, maintaining a strong focus on steady work and continuing progress for all students. As several students said, 'the teachers keep just the right amount of pressure on us to keep us working'. Where concerns emerge, the support of the intervention and counseling teams is quickly brought to bear. The result is an integrated structure of teaching, support and guidance where nobody struggles along without help.

The aim of the school to maximize achievements for all students permeates all aspects of school life. Grade and department team meetings focus relentlessly on making a difference for each student. The staff constantly discuss with one another, the difficulties they may have with groups or individual students. There is a constant stream of advice and suggestions exchanged in mutual support.

For those students for whom learning has more hurdles, the quality of support, which they receive from the specific team of teachers and assistants, is a key factor in ensuring that they too, make the best progress they can. The school identified a group of students that had great difficulties in adapting to classroom or school routines. Many of these students were at significant risk of dropping out of school or becoming disruptive to an intolerable degree. A teacher set about constructing an alternative education program to allow the students to work at own pace and schedule. As a result, these students have become really engaged in work of their own choosing which is carefully matched to their interests. This approach results in large measures of success and many students gradually acclimatize to school life to the point where they can cope with normal classes and routines. Several of the programs are structured to allow students to gain credits for their work, adding a further dimension to its success. The careful planning, meticulous organization and thorough evaluation has helped establish and refine this approach to the point where it is about to be shared on a wider education front.

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.

Highly effective curriculum planning ensures the school meets statutory requirements, while also matching the students’ needs and fulfilling the school’s aims. All subjects have detailed four-year plans and regular review points. Department teams continuously refine and adjust their plans in the light of experience and on the basis of the information they get about the achievements of their students. The well conceived system of student presentations is highly effective. It allows them to present work that interests them and in ways that challenge and extend their subject knowledge at the same time as developing their reading, writing and speaking skills. The teachers increasingly use their assessments of these presentations as a stimulus for reviewing their own teaching in order to help students even more.

From evidence presented and from direct observation, the quality of teaching is good. The teachers plan their lessons very well and because they establish such good relations with the students, the atmosphere is relaxed, businesslike and purposeful. The work captures the students’ interests because the teachers have created attractive learning environments and use the resources and space in flexible and imaginative ways to meet the needs of individuals.

The senior leaders have made astute financial and planning decisions. There is a good balance of pedagogic and support staff. The hiring of consultants has brought very specific benefits such as support for the program of family advisory meetings. There has been careful thought and practical action taken to ensure good succession planning for key posts.

This is an efficient school; staff have overcome the constraints of having to share facilities, and their time is used productively. Staff expertise supports the after school and Saturday sessions very effectively.

The constant engagement between staff and students is infectious and reinforced by the strong concern the staff show for the students’ well-being. The students care strongly for each other and the sense of family and teamwork is palpable. The climate of the school is always positive and reinforced by specific reminders on constructive rather than negative

dialogue. The result is a school where mutual trust is very secure and students always have someone they feel comfortable in approaching if they need advice or have a problem.

The school is vigilant about absences and takes a strong line on regular attendance. The systems of communication with parents are good and particular issues followed up quickly. The work of the student counselor and parent coordinator has done much to cement strong relations between school and families.

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 school hires staff who can teach in a flexible, imaginative manner and who have the ability to engage with students who from time to time may present specific challenges. Sufficient senior staff have been engaged with expertise in data systems to ensure that the school can sustain and build upon the collection and analysis of information on students' progress. Senior leaders focus strongly on data to drive standards higher and know when and how to make the most effective changes. A good example is this year's restructuring of staff across grades in order to get a better overall match to the needs of the curriculum.

Staff are constantly aware of their professional development needs and much pedagogical evolution takes place within team or department meetings. Specific extended sessions at strategic points of the year augment the process. Imaginative ideas such as staff portfolio presentation or the use of demonstration lessons with staff as recipients adds color and variation to development activities.

Regular informal and periodic formal observations of their teaching also enhance staff development. The teachers report this as helpful in addressing weaknesses and building on strengths. Informal inter-visitations are further examples of the mutual support and teamwork within the school. New teachers receive very good support. For example, they have specific coaching in running family advisory groups, with these modeled for them as necessary.

The work of the different teams is a significant strength of the school. Meetings are well planned and decisions carefully recorded. Minutes of meetings show a consistent consideration of students' achievement data and a strong focus on using knowledge of individuals to adjust programs or lesson content. There is openness amongst staff that derives from the ethos of trust and care which the school creates.

The principal is the key driver in the development of the school and well supported by her assistant principals and all other staff. She is very widely respected and undoubtedly has the capacity to take the school forward. Daily routines run smoothly. Office staff make sure that everyday matters such as checks on absent students do not detract from teachers' time.

The school has entered into a very strong and productive partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau, an arrangement that enhances the school's aims and focus. The partner organization provides a wide range of services and advice to students on everything from health matters to college applications, from internship placements to sports activities and

from computer access to support with homework. This heightens students' interests in continued education and lifts their horizons and ambitions.

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.

The school has a carefully constructed set of development plans. These set out in sufficient detail the tasks and goals to be achieved. Responsibilities are clear and targets sufficiently robust to ensure steady improvement.

Department subject plans are well constructed and arrangements for review set down. There are specific planning requirements, which staff adhere to when constructing new courses. There are a few aspects of development planning where more precise and quantifiable targets are lacking. For example, the development of the program for students' presentations does not set improvement targets for future years.

The school has a good handle on the relative performance of most aspects of students' work. Classes, grades and subjects all come under careful periodic scrutiny and adjustments made where necessary. The school has determined that students need more challenge in higher grades particularly in mathematics. The students too feel this is needed and the school has plans in hand.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Community School for Social Justice (HS 427)	∅	✓	+
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