



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**University Heights High School**

**High School 495**

**181st Street and University Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10453**

**Principal: Dr Brenda Bravo**

**Dates of review: April 24 - 25, 2007**

**Reviewer: Eileen Hill**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

University Heights High School is a co-educational school with 432 students enrolled in grades 9 through 12. Sixty per cent of the students are Hispanic, 30% black and the others a mixture of White and Asian. There are 49 special education students and 24 English language learners. The school receives Title 1 funding for almost 80% of its students. This figure is high compared with City and similar schools. Attendance is 85% this year.

The school is located on the campus of Bronx Community College and has access to the College facilities, including the gymnasium. The school is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and is a founding member of the Center for Collaborative Education. Students from all over the City are entitled to attend the school but most students are from the Bronx.

The school houses the program, Living for the Young Family through Education, which provides day-care and training for up to 15 children from birth through 3 years, and their young mothers, most of whom attend the school. The school is accountable for the attendance of both the children and their mothers.

The school is an Alternative School, involved in a collaborative with the City University of New York, and was originally established to work with older students who had not been successful in other high schools. Over the past two years, the school has recruited students directly from middle schools into the 9th grade. It intends to continue with this policy. As part of its alternative school status the school is allowed to graduate its students from subjects other than English language arts (ELA) on performance-based assessments.

The school has empowerment status. 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.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school makes excellent use of data and other relevant information to track and monitor the progress and performance of its students.
- All goals, plans and priorities for the school are based on data and drive the activity of all members of the school community.
- The school offers a challenging and varied curriculum to the students.
- Teachers are held fully accountable for improving instruction.
- Staff know the students very well, respond professionally and sensitively to their personal, social and academic needs and are successful in helping them to achieve their potential.
- Attendance and engagement are a high priority for the school.
- The school is very well led and managed and the principal is well respected by the staff.
- Professional development is carefully planned and is fully aligned with the priorities identified by the school.
- Youth development and support services are very strong.
- School priorities and goals are regularly and systematically reviewed and alignments are swift and flexible.

### What the school needs to improve

- Make more consistent use of the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) for planning.
- Continue to encourage parents to be involved in the life of the school.
- Continue to work with teachers on strategies to differentiate instruction.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well-developed school.**

The school is well led. It is small, which means that staff know and work with students individually. Intervention programs focus tightly on ensuring students make academic progress, while taking account of their personal, social and emotional needs. Leaders and teachers successfully foster a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility, which works for both students and staff. The school hired consultants to help it make better use of its data and it now has high quality data on which to base its planning and review. Data is used very well to monitor and support the progress of individual students. The curriculum is broad and designed to develop language and thinking skills. The poetry of students has been published. After-school activities, challenging instruction and programs designed to build self-esteem and trust, combine to develop the skills and confidence of the students. Most of them thrive in the school. Professional development is particularly well developed. The school has close links with community-based organizations. The funding and support it receives from its various links contribute significantly to its resources and to the varied and imaginative programs for its students.

### 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 makes excellent use of a range of data to monitor the progress of its students. Teachers use the information they collect from informal and periodic assessments, attendance, class work and homework, to complete and send home, progress reports on students every 28 days. All assessment data, both formal and informal, is collated centrally and used by the school to check the progress made by individual students, grades, classes and subjects. Assessment and other data is used to monitor the progress of the various sub groups in the school, including the different ethnic and gender groups, the English language learners and special education students.

Teachers and school leaders are particularly concerned to ensure all students fulfill their academic potential. Because of the language development needs of most of the students, they focus particularly on monitoring progress in English language arts and progress towards credit accumulation for Regents' examinations. Students in all grades keep portfolios of written work, which are used for assessment.. The school systematically compares the performance and progress for individuals, classes, grades and cohorts against previous years. The school can demonstrate the progress of individuals over the four-year period in the school and show how academic and other interventions help to keep students on track. Teachers make regular visits to other schools in order to compare progress and performance and to understand how the school can further improve what it is doing.

**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 well developed.**

School leaders engage all staff in a collaborative process for setting goals for whole school priorities, for individuals and for groups of students. The whole school goals set out in the CEP, are determined by the outcomes for students over the year and by trends over time. Teachers are in no doubt about key goals. The principal and assistant principal meet each morning with teachers to exchange information about students and to check the accuracy of attendance data. The Chairs of each curriculum team meet each week with their subject teachers to plan their work and to set and review goals for individual or groups of students. Having identified a target group of students who are not successful in particular subjects, Grade Directors meet each week with their teams to monitor the progress of these students and to establish further interventions.

The school gives particular attention to aligning academic support services to students who are achieving below grade level, such as some English language learners, special education students and others who have social, emotional and personal needs. Goal setting for students drives the activity of all members of the school community. The school conveys high expectations to the students and very regularly communicates information on their progress to parents. A minority of parents works closely with the school and actively supports it, but in spite of the school’s efforts to involve parents, it struggles to attract significant numbers to curriculum workshops and other events.

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

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

The curriculum fully aligns with and implements the mandated curriculum. The school accelerates the learning of some of its older students so that they pass their Regents examinations by the 10th grade and can then begin to accumulate college credits. At present, only a minority of students is in the early college program. However, the whole school focus on writing and vocabulary development, on counseling, interventions and raising expectations and self-esteem, is designed to increase the number of students graduating with college credits.

Data on the progress and performance of individuals is the firm basis for all instructional programs. Teachers are fully accountable for improving instruction and for student outcomes. They plan weekly in curriculum teams and individually for their classes. The school has developed rubrics for planning and assessment. Teachers do not always differentiate their teaching to take sufficient account of the needs of individuals and groups in their classes and this is the focus of ongoing professional development.

Budgeting, scheduling and staffing decisions are carefully aligned around the needs of the students. For example, the school groups students who do not perform well in mathematics in one class for more intensive instruction. It places students who achieve high scores in tests and assessments in honors classes. It provides English language

learners with specialist instruction to help them to develop their English skills. Special education students are supported by purposeful push-in intervention.

Instructional activities engage the students and challenge them intellectually. Family groups, the Project Adventure trust-building program taken by all students, and other counseling interventions, help the students to develop self-esteem and confidence. Student attendance and engagement are very high priorities for the school. Attendance is monitored daily, both for attendance at school and in lessons. Absence is followed up immediately by phone calls home and a subsequent discussion with the student. Home visits are made where necessary. Intervention and support programs, such as those offered by Good Shepherd, have further improved attendance and supported academic progress.

**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 has a hiring committee for selecting leaders and teachers. The school only employs those who can demonstrate a commitment to its culture. Teachers are hired based on certification and strong knowledge of their specialist subject. Prospective teachers are required to teach a short lesson as part of the selection process and all new teachers and leaders must have strong capacity to understand and use data to support instruction.

Professional development is a major strength of the school. It is very well planned and closely aligned to whole school priorities. Coaching is provided for individual teachers where necessary. Teachers in their first year are carefully inducted into the procedures and expectations of the school. Staff make inter-visitations and leaders and staff visit other schools when planning new initiatives, such as the early start college program. The principal, assistant principal and dean regularly observe classes to monitor the work of teachers. The leadership knows the strengths and weaknesses of the staff and has strategies for supporting them and improving their instruction.

All staff are involved in planning and kept up to date with progress and developments through the regular program of meetings, including the daily half-hour staff meeting each morning. The staff respect the principal and she has strong capacity to effect change. The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis and has effective systems for communication.

Youth development and support services are excellent. They are fully aligned around academic goals and help the school to achieve its success in areas such as improved attendance and the early college program. The school provides a wide range of after school classes for the students in sport, photography, music, writing and the arts. These contribute to the intellectual, personal and social development of the students and help the school to meet its academic goals by engaging students in a broad and challenging range of activities.

**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 detailed CEP in which it records its plans and goals for the year. However, it does not use the CEP as a working document and does not update it in the light of revisions and alignments. Nevertheless, the school consistently reviews and revises its main priorities and goals in the light of the data it collects on its students. January is the interim review point, following the outcomes of tests and Regents examinations.

The school uses data from tests and other information to align the schedules of students, create new groups and classes and provide interventions to students who do not perform as well as expected. Data sets clearly show the progress and performance of individuals over time and the impact made by focused teaching and other interventions. The school also uses data to make extensive comparisons of students' progress within and across classrooms, to identify patterns. In response to the data on students' performance in English language arts, the school has targeted its developments on improving students' writing. A double block of English language arts is programmed for students in 9th and 10th grades. These actions have improved the English language arts test scores for students.

Staff meet together regularly to revise plans and interventions, particularly those for individual students. The staff attend a whole-school planning and review retreat at the end of the year. Based on data, teachers review progress against the school's plans and against the performance of students and then work in teams to revise and realign curriculum and assessment activities for the next year. This process is very thorough. The school's clear focus on planning and realignment enables teachers and others to recognize the impact of their work on students' progress and performance and make swift adjustments where require.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: University Heights School (HS 495)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<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>			<b>X</b>
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>			<b>X</b>
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>			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* 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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<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>	∅	✓	+
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>	∅	✓	+
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>	∅	✓	+
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