



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The High School for Contemporary Arts

High School 544

800 East Gun Hill Road

Bronx

NY 10467

Principal: Francisco Sanchez

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Reviewer: Jean Mackie

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The High School for Contemporary Arts is located in the Evander Childs Campus in the Williamsbridge area of the Bronx. The school opened as a new, smaller institution in 2003, sharing the campus with a number of other newly formed smaller schools. It now enrolls 402 students, covering grades 9 to 12. This year's twelfth graders will be the first to graduate from the school. Almost 50% of students are Black and 46% are Hispanic. The remaining 4% of students are either White or Asian. There are a few recent immigrants who have arrived from the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, though there are fewer immigrants than in other schools in the City. The proportion of special education students is 9%, and 5% are English language learners. There is a much higher percentage of girls than boys in the school. The school has been entitled to Title 1 funding for the last three years. Attendance is above that of both similar schools and the City-wide average. The school experienced a number of changes in leadership during its first two years of existence and the current principal is the third to have held the post since the opening of the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The energetic and well respected principal is an inspiration to the school community.
- There is a strong team culture within the school, with all staff fully committed to the academic and personal development of the students.
- Data has been used effectively to track and monitor the progress of individual students.
- The school has been effective in realigning the curriculum to ensure that twelfth graders are well prepared for graduation.
- Relationships within the school are very positive and students and adults respect each other.
- The high aspirations and expectations that the staff have for the students have led to improved attendance and behavior.
- There is some very effective group work, which is challenging the students and which encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Most students are eager to learn and succeed.
- The strong focus on music, drama and art is valued by the students and contributes significantly to their overall development and progress.
- Students, parents and staff are all very proud of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Track the relative performance of different groups of students more systematically.
- Take steps to ensure a greater consistency in the use of data at subject level to monitor and track progress.
- Strengthen instructional practices to include more differentiated approaches.
- Develop the use of peer assessment in class.
- Monitor the impact of staff development on student outcomes more systematically.
- Formalize the sharing of data across disciplines so that the common understanding of performance is used systematically to improve student achievement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with some well developed features.

The inspirational principal has been the driving force behind this increasingly successful school. He has motivated staff, students and parents so that all have a strong desire to achieve well. Attendance has risen and the students' attitudes to their work have improved significantly. An initial analysis of data indicated that the current twelfth graders had an imbalance of credits which would prevent them from graduating. The data has been used to analyze their needs, realign the curriculum and focus on improving instructional strategies. This process has benefited not only the students in the twelfth grade but also provided a firm foundation for following cohorts.

The curriculum has a strong arts element which is particularly appreciated by the students, and supports their development as full and rounded individuals. The strong team spirit within the school encourages the sharing of best practices, which is helping to improve the quality of instruction. The school recognizes the need to develop greater consistency in a number of areas of its work and is actively taking steps to do so. Relationships are very positive within the school, which is well placed to undertake the next stage of development.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school is collecting and analyzing an increasingly detailed set of data to monitor and track student performance and progress. This has been particularly important as the current principal discovered on his arrival that students had been following a curriculum that would not enable the present twelfth graders to graduate. The principal, along with the guidance counselor, spent a great deal of time collating student transcripts so that information at the individual student level is now comprehensive in all grades.

Whole-school data is circulated to all staff so that all teachers and support staff, including teaching aides, have a clear picture of what is happening, not only at grade level, but across subjects as well. The principal and his team scrutinize the data carefully to identify where strengths and weaknesses are. Mathematics, for example, has been identified as an area where performance needs to be improved. The school's results are analyzed very carefully against those in similar schools and outcomes compare very favorably. The progress of different cohorts within the school is tracked systematically. Initial analysis indicates that students in the lower grades, who have had a more stable educational experience, are demonstrating better progress than the older students.

Teachers use running records to monitor the students' progress on a regular basis. Particular attention is given to tracking the achievements of special education students and English language learners.

At present, the relative performance of different groups according to gender and ethnicity is analyzed informally rather than formally and this is recognized as an area for development. The principal and his team are also keen that all staff are equally effective in analyzing the data in more detail at subject level, rather than just at individual student level. He has made all of the data accessible to staff electronically to aid this process.

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 high aspirations of the principal and staff underpin the drive to reach ever challenging targets. The progress of the different cohorts within the school has been used to inform the goals for the future at the whole-school level. This information has been distributed widely so that there is a shared appreciation of what is expected. Subject staff have contributed to the process by identifying clear goals for their particular area of expertise. They are becoming increasingly confident about doing so and are establishing clear plans to achieve them. The use of the data to set individual subject-specific goals for students is also developing, but practice is still variable.

Teachers work with support staff to establish suitably challenging targets for special education students and English language learners. Data is used systematically to identify their next learning steps. Teachers often use their assessment records to select those students who would benefit from extra support, either after school or at lunchtime. This year there has been a strong focus on ensuring that the oldest students have gained the correct balance of credits to enable them to graduate.

Parents have regular and detailed information about the curriculum being offered and the progress that their child is making. They appreciate the high aspirations that the school has for their children and fully support them. The students themselves are well aware of what is expected of them and show a real determination to succeed. This is especially the case for twelfth grade students who have had to make up a lot of ground this year. The contributions of local community members who are regularly involved with the school are valued and often used to inform to the setting of goals and aspirations for the future.

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 was radically adjusted as soon as the principal and his team joined the school and realized that the previous schedule would not allow students to collect the required balance of credits to graduate. There is now a clear curriculum calendar which provides the students with a broad and balanced experience as they move through the grades. There are very good opportunities for music, theater and art, to which the students are especially attracted. There is considerable talent in the school for arts education, which is being developed well. The principal has supported this emphasis by

improving the resources for both music and drama. The new theater is a good example of this, and is much valued by the students.

Teachers plan their own schedules to ensure that the students' knowledge and understanding of their subject is developed systematically. There is some good practice evident where some teachers are using performance data effectively to group students and encourage peer discussion and evaluation. In other instances, opportunities to differentiate instruction and promote peer work are not always taken. The majority of students are well focused on their work and respond positively to their teachers, especially when the instruction is lively and challenging. Relationships are good, with mutual respect shown between the students and adults in the school. Teachers are aware that they are accountable not only for the curriculum covered but also the progress that their students make.

The principal has taken active steps to appoint staff who will provide good coverage of the curriculum schedule. The recently appointed assistant principal, for example, has an expertise in mathematics which is currently an area for development. The students and staff recognize the high esteem with which they are regarded through, for example, the high quality books and furniture which have been recently purchased by the principal.

Attendance is a high priority and is tracked very carefully. Data shows that figures are rising and attendance is now over 90 percent. Rigorous systems, including clear rewards and sanctions, are in place to tackle absenteeism.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The principal, since his arrival, has quickly established a strong team of leaders who share his vision and are eager to use data to inform and improve the progress of the students. The two assistant principals, along with the guidance counselor, provide good support and expertise in this area.

Professional development is an important focus within the school. Needs are identified through discussions with teachers, from a program of regular classroom observations and the analysis of student performance data. Following the first marking period, for example, the principal called all staff together to discuss strategies for revising the curriculum and instructional practice to increase student achievement. Teachers, in subject groups, all produced a range of strategies that are now beginning to be implemented. Team teaching is encouraged. All teachers have a strong desire to see the students do well so there is a good deal of informal sharing of practice and ideas amongst the staff. Support staff are consulted regularly for guidance about effective strategies for working with special education students and those who are English language learners. Systems for monitoring the impact of the range of professional development activities on direct outcomes for students remain informal rather than systematic, however.

The principal is highly regarded by the whole of the school community. His charismatic personality has already motivated students and staff to develop a school with learning at its heart. He has both the drive and the energy to secure further change. The school is well managed on a day to day basis, with effective communication about procedural matters, important dates and any special events. Members of the local community are

regularly drawn in to work with the school and their contributions to the development of the students are much valued.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal uses the comprehensive education plan as the main tool for reviewing past actions and setting goals for the future. His senior team has been instrumental in compiling the document and subject specialists have also been involved by setting goals for their own curriculum areas. Progress towards these goals is discussed between members of the senior team and the relevant subject leaders periodically throughout the year. The performance of students in their assessments is used as a basis for discussion and plans are amended if progress does not appear to be on target. The meeting held following the first marking period is a good example of this. The school recognizes the need to sharpen its analysis of interim assessments at subject and classroom level so that instructional practice can be modified accordingly. Similarly, the sharing of data across disciplines to inform consistent and coherent interventions is undertaken through informal rather than formal systems.

At individual level, there is a good analysis of where students are with regard to credit accumulation and what is required for them to graduate. Additional support through after school and Saturday sessions is often recommended if students appear to be at risk of failing. Progress towards the targets set for special education students and English language learners is regularly reviewed and plans amended accordingly.

The processes of review and evaluation are beginning to take hold, with all staff fully committed to doing the best for their students. The school is in a good position to take on its next stage of development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The High School for Contemporary Arts (HS 544)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

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

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

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

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	Ø	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	Ø	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	Ø	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	