



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The New Explorers School for Film and
Humanities**

**High School 547
701 St Ann's Avenue
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Denise Simone

Dates of review: May 23 - 24, 2007

Reviewer: Peter Williman

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The New Explorers High School for Film and Humanities serves 316 students in grades 9 through 12. The student population comprises 59% Hispanic students, 38% Black students, 2% White students and 1% Asian students and those from other ethnic backgrounds. Special education students represent 16% of the total school population while nearly 4% of students are English language learners. Attendance is 82.9% which is well below the average figures for similar and City schools.

The school receives Title 1 funding for 63.5% of its students. This figure is well above that of City and similar schools. The school has been open for four years and only has graduation statistics for one cohort of students. The school currently is small with limited resources. The principal has been in post for four months.

This 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.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a clear vision to raise achievement while retaining the integrity of the school's foundation.
- The administration gathers an appropriate range of data through which to understand student achievement.
- Teachers are beginning to use technology effectively to manage class data.
- Good use is made of a consultancy to provide a clear analysis of student achievement and progress.
- Counselling support to students has been improved through an extended advisory service.
- The teaching team is dedicated to developing high standards within the context of a film-based education.
- The film-based curriculum is used effectively to engage students' interest.
- Resolution of key school issues is undertaken through collaborative discussion.
- The school has developed a strong respect agenda between staff and students and this is valued by students and parents.

What the school needs to improve

- Consolidate teachers' understanding, sharing and use of data to inform differentiation and to target instruction to raise achievement.
- Complete the review and implementation of the teaching of English language arts across the curriculum initiative to raise achievement and progress.
- Disaggregate data more effectively to track the performance and progress of special education students and English language learners, and to identify any underperformance in relation to gender and ethnicity.
- Create greater clarity and detail in school planning to ensure goals have objectives which are specific, measurable, achievable and scheduled to enable effective monitoring of progress and evaluation of their impact.
- Improve student punctuality and attendance.
- Develop further strategies to increase parental involvement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The New Explorers High School for Film and the Humanities has been open for four years. Consequently, only one cohort of students has passed through to graduation. The school has reached its full capacity and, under the leadership of the new principal, is rightly, undergoing a full review of its achievements and development programs. The administration has sufficient data of to track student progress across the four grades and, with the assistance of a consultancy, is coordinating that information effectively to gain a detailed overview of the school. Teachers' knowledge and skills, generally, are developing concurrently. Initial data demonstrates the school has had success in its achievements.

The administration uses data effectively to make decisions, which maintains the integrity, aims and aspirations of the foundation of the school, but with a balance of challenging goals, to enable each student to be well equipped to achieve their best. Currently, data is not analyzed sufficiently to identify groups and subgroups of students, who may with further help progress at a faster pace. Furthermore, plans are not sufficiently detailed to give good quality indicators as to their impact on student progress and achievement. The school uses the opportunities of film and associated study well to enthuse students to want to learn but unfortunately, this is not accompanied by improved attendance overall.

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 use of a consultancy has assisted the school significantly in coordinating and managing its student data and, as a result, the administration has a detailed, regularly updated overview and understanding of achievement at the level of individual students, class and grade cohort. This is particularly important in a small school with limited resources. Surveys of teacher and student views add a further dimension to this overview. Counselors track students' progress well and have appropriate conversations to enable students to be fully aware of their own progress. They disseminate this information to parents and teachers.

Teachers use manual and computer spreadsheet records effectively to monitor student engagement and success in class. These include student scores for program studies, attendance and lateness. However, there is insufficient consistency in the quality of teachers' records. Where there is more systematic practice through computer based records, the opportunities for broader analysis are not always fully realized. Similarly, at the whole school level there is insufficient group and subgroup analysis of the progress of ethnic groups and groups within the special education and English language student populations. The school does not identify any other groups for specific monitoring, although the developing life skills of students generally are monitored in the Advisory classes.

There is very limited data for comparison purposes because of the school's short history. The administration does visit other schools to review their practices. Comparison of student progress identifies those who are on track for graduation or could take alternative examinations at a different level to promote achievement. Effective use is made of available data to compare class, grade and subject performance. Appropriate use of this comparative analysis helps grade teams and teachers to be aware of the relative impact of their instruction and areas for improvement.

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.

Review of school progress is put to good use in identifying goals focused on raising student achievement. The school has a wide range of generally effective teams to plan curriculum, instruction and support for students. These teams are beginning to use the 'Understanding by Design' review process to good effect to revise plans in order to create greater continuity in the work of the school. Staff surveys assist in capturing a wider perspective in planning. As a result, teams of staff are working on formatting detailed curricula to improve the quality of literacy teaching across the curriculum. The role and expectations of grade teams in managing and using data have been increased to align with the whole school focus on data, although this is not yet consistent practice across all teams.

The school has an ongoing focus on those students who are functioning at levels 1 and 2 and school data is used appropriately to monitor their progress specifically. There is, however, a weakness in whole school plans overall in that success criteria are often insufficiently precise to properly evaluate the outcomes. Plans are not sufficiently detailed to include schedules to gauge progress through the interim stages or information on the data, which will assist monitoring.

. Teachers in grade and subject teams plan next learning steps from their curriculum maps. However, they do not always use the data or assessment appropriately to ensure lessons are sufficiently demanding of students. For example, in one very well-structured lesson, pre-assessment had not been used to identify that many students were already fully competent in the work at the beginning and were not sufficiently challenged. Better planning providing better challenge was observed in a special education class in which students opted to prepare a case for or against the death penalty.

Students respond to the school's high expectations, set by the principal, through the necessity of frequently making presentations and showings of their visual media work. The bulletin boards pay tribute to this. The councilors specifically identify improvement points with students and this supports the work of teachers. Parents are not involved enough in the life and work of the school. The founding aim of the school is the significant factor that unites students, faculty and leaders to have an enthusiasm to make the school successful.

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 appropriately designed to meet mandatory requirements. With the advent of the first cohort of students reaching graduation, the school is using the evidence of experience to modify and adjust the curriculum to raise achievement further, through, for example, ensuring that all subjects consciously integrate literacy consistent with school plans. This assists in the monitoring of progress across a spectrum of learning.

The regularity of assessments through marking periods and external examinations results in teachers being held frequently to account for the quality of their work. Grade team reviews and observation by the administration strengthen this accountability. The school does not have statistical records and analysis to provide a current longitudinal view of each student’s progress to aggregate an understanding of the pace of their improvement and therefore the impact of instruction. Some differentiation in teaching is managed through grouping special education students in classes. However, apart from occasions of individual support, data is not used extensively to differentiate learning such as by level of performance or style of learning.

Budget and the limited resources are used effectively. The funding of two counselors to increase the ratio to students has been a good investment for the school and benefits students significantly by giving them greater access to individual support and guidance. Teachers are hired as a result of data analysis as a recent hiring of an additional science teacher illustrates. The scheduling of teachers discretely to grades effectively supports the goal to strengthen grade teams.

The school has developed a culture of strong respect between staff and students and this is valued by students and makes the academic support teachers provide more effective. The result is generally good relationships in lessons with students being attentive and engaged in their work. This is especially evident in media based lessons. Even though the school has established systems to reduce absence and tardiness, these issues remain a challenge for the 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.

The principal and assistant principal have developed a concerted policy to improve achievement. They lead by example in demonstrating their expectations of how faculty should use data effectively. The level of teacher awareness of the value of data to inform teaching has been raised but, as yet, is not consolidated.

Professional development is appropriately matched to the needs of teachers revealed through the administrators’ regular walkthroughs, discussions and surveys. Inter-visitations with other schools provide valuable benchmarks and ideas for developing new initiatives. The principal knows her staff well and has strategies to strengthen and support each teacher’s development. As a result, there is a new teacher development program,

which functions on a weekly basis. However, professional development plans are not as effective as they could be because outcomes are not sufficiently monitored to ensure there is the desired impact.

The principal has been in post for four months, but she is using her overall evaluation of the school and the assistant principal as a sounding board to begin to formulate an appropriate strategy to take the school forward. The cabinet forms the hub which links the work of grade teams, the guidance team, intervention teachers, school partners and the administration. This ensures plans and review of developments can be shared. The definition of outcomes is not yet clear enough in planning in order to sharpen evaluation and the principal is well placed to take this forward. She has established procedures and made her expectations clear to students in order for the school to run smoothly, particularly in classroom. The alliance with the Ghetto Film School strengthens the curriculum of the school and the opportunities for students significantly. The partnership with 'New Visions' gives valuable consultancy to the administration and is recognized schoolwide for its support.

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 structures for evaluating individual student progress are integral to the schedule of marking periods and State examinations and work effectively by virtue of the school's data management system. However, the data from this process is not aligned to the overall planning process or with objective target setting for students, classes and grades within the Comprehensive Education Plan.

Planning is not sufficiently scheduled to give specific interim points for monitoring progress. Comparisons of achievements from the marking period records are used appropriately to evaluate student progress towards graduation, which is the school's core goal for all students. As a result of this level of overview, the school is revising the literacy curriculum and the curriculum for the Advisory element of the schedule.

Despite the weaknesses of the Comprehensive Education Plan, there are sound processes in place through, for example, the regular work of the cabinet and other teams and through well timed retreats to ensure flexible reconsideration and revision of plans year-to-year. The principal is especially conscious of the need to look back evaluatively at this time in the school's development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The new Explorers High School (HS 547)	∅	✓	+
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	