



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Seth Low

Middle School 096

**99 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Barry Fein

Dates of review: May 22 – 23, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Richard D D'Auria

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

Progress made since the last review
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

Seth Low is a middle school with 1,066 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 21.47% Black, 18.47% Hispanic, 30.95% White, and 28.84% Asian students. The student body includes 14.3% English language learners and 13.9% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.8%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 68% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal empowers the staff to make instructional decisions with guidance and support.
- Teachers are effectively organized into interdisciplinary grade-based teams that collaborate and plan together.
- All members of the school community work together to provide a safe and nurturing multi-cultural learning environment for all students.
- An enriched curriculum offers students opportunities in the arts, music and dance.
- Several partners, including the Federation of Italian American Organizations, supplement the school's curriculum.
- Teachers use a variety of assessment tools, including Acuity and student work portfolios, to monitor and track progress.
- Students are encouraged to achieve high expectations in preparation for high school and beyond.
- Parents are provided with multiple opportunities to participate as partners in their child's education.

What the school needs to improve

- Implement and encourage the consistent use of standards-based rubrics to assess and provide feedback to students about their work.
- Provide continued professional development and modeling of strategies to further differentiate instruction across all grades and content areas.
- Formalize a systemic process whereby interim goals for students can be regularly measured over time throughout the school year.
- Sustain and expand the school's inquiry team as a catalyst to deepen the understanding of using formative assessments to guide instruction.
- Systematize visitation opportunities for teachers, both within and outside the school, in order to more effectively expose staff to best practices.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Teachers are provided with professional autonomy in a collegial and supportive environment. A number of initiatives are underway to address the areas that were previously identified as areas for improvement in the last Quality Review. The school is effectively reorganized by grade level to enable teachers to plan collaboratively. All constituents describe a warm, nurturing environment where all are welcomed and encouraged. Opportunities for students in the arts, music and dance enrich the curriculum. The school works with a variety of external partners to further enhance the supports offered to students. Teachers are using a variety of assessments and student work portfolios to continually monitor their students' progress and adjust their teaching. There are high expectations for students and parents are welcomed as true partners in their child's education.

The school does not yet consistently assess student work and provide feedback to students using standards-based rubrics. While teachers are developing a variety of strategies to further differentiate their instruction, these practices are not yet consistent throughout the school. While teachers do regularly conference with students and their parents about their progress and skills in need of improvement, formal interim goal setting for students is not yet a systemic practice within the school. Although the school's inquiry team supports the analysis of data to improve instruction, the school faces challenges due to other commitments of the team members after school that affects the ability of the group to meet regularly. Some teachers do informally observe each other and some staff members have visited other schools to learn and share effective practices, but these opportunities are currently limited.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers are effectively using a variety of diagnostic tests, including Acuity, to determine the progress of students. Teachers also use student work portfolios to assess the progress of students. Testing confirms the school's hypothesis that writing skills are generally weak within students' English language arts performance. As a result, a primary school goal is the improvement of literacy skills, particularly writing, across the content areas.

One of the school's strengths lies in its support for special education students. Wilson-trained teachers work with students who are unable to decode, a critical reading skill. Progress is evident since more students are decertified into less restrictive learning environments with appropriate support.

New English language learners regularly enter the school throughout the year. The school closely monitors their progress. Teachers provide them with communication "survival" skills. Those skills have a positive impact on their ability to adjust culturally and gain greater acceptance among their English speaking peers. Preliminary comparisons of student performance among various student ethnic and gender groups reveal insignificant differences. The school finds that the most significant factor affecting overall student performance is whether English is the language spoken in the home.

Administration tracks the performance of students as they move from grade to grade. It then presents this information to all members of the school community using colorful charts. The principal communicates regularly with colleagues of both similar and somewhat dissimilar schools. Although inter-visitation of staff with a high school provided an effective opportunity for teachers to gain insight on the expectations for students as they transition, visits to other schools have been limited. The high school visit is a start toward smoother articulation between grades.

While several vendors support the training of teachers in the use of assessments to guide instruction, new accountability tools require continued training and support. New information is further turn-keyed among members of the staff.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

The school reorganized to more effectively enable teachers of different subjects to meet and plan by grade level. Each assistant principal now supervises teachers on a particular grade across the content areas. This structure facilitates more effective communication among staff on the progress of students whom they share. In addition, teachers collaboratively establish goals for each grade, working with their assistant principal. However, individual goal setting for every student is not yet systemic. They currently focus primarily upon struggling learners. The students with greatest need receive individual tutoring and additional support services.

Whole school goals are regularly shared with all, and the school's leadership team and parent teacher association play an active and supportive role. Students indicate that teachers have high expectations and that the school is preparing them well for high school and beyond. Parents confirm this. One parent said, "Teachers are really here for the kids, 100% for the kids!" While goals are discussed, a systemic process for establishing written goals with timeframes for achieving them is not yet developed. Formal conversations regarding preparing for high school start at the beginning of the seventh grade. Many parents participate in parent-teacher conferences.

Administration maintains an open door policy and tries to resolve issues. The principal's cell phone number is available to parents. Parents and students confirm the existence

of a warm, welcoming atmosphere. There are multiple opportunities for students and their parent and/or caregivers to share information on goals and progress.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

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

Administration is responsive to teachers’ instructional needs. Diverse curricula supports include a variety of novels that meet the reading interests of students. Rolling library carts for reading teachers effectively enable student choice. Opportunities in instrumental music, the arts and dance engage students in an enriched curriculum. Formal and informal observations provide constructive feedback to teachers and they are beginning conversations around student performance and their own accountability. Teachers use a school-developed student progress tracking sheet to monitor the advancement of their students from one level to another throughout the school year.

While some teachers implement a variety of strategies to meet the needs of their students, the differentiation of instruction is not yet a consistent practice throughout the school. The school uses its budget to reduce class size and this further enables teachers to meet the individual learning needs of their students. A special literacy class is in place for students who did not meet promotional standards in grade 7 last year. Teachers emphasize the benefits of their autonomy with guidance from the administration and how they value their collaboration and comfort in exchanging and trying new ideas with colleagues. The school mobilizes multiple family assistants to encourage and monitor students’ attendance and punctuality. Students and parents acknowledge personal telephone calls made to the home. Students receive positive incentives such as awards for excellent attendance given at an awards assembly.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

The administrative team uses both formal and informal observations to promote the continual improvement of teaching and learning. The school developed a user friendly form to facilitate informal observations. Written observations do not currently provide consistent feedback supporting and encouraging the use of differentiated strategies. Since data indicates that many students have weak inference and writing skills, the school emphasizes the development of these skills across grades and content areas. Professional development sessions focus upon the writing workshop, the use of rubrics and the introduction of literacy circles within classrooms.

Some teachers informally observe one another. This most often involves newer teachers and those introducing literacy circles within their classrooms. However, this practice is not yet systemic across the school and visits to other schools have been very limited. New teachers receive a mentor and one or more buddy teachers. One relatively new teacher appreciated the opportunity to regularly observe other teachers during her

first year. Coaches or staff developers in literacy and mathematics also provide ongoing support and presence within the classroom in support of teachers. The school offered an effective six-week Saturday seminar series for new teachers on classroom management and related topics.

Every grade has a cohesive team including an assistant principal, staff developer, family assistant, dean and guidance counsellor. Together, they meet the social and emotional needs of each student. A faculty handbook, the citywide code of conduct and teacher contracts document protocols and expectations. The visibility of administration and staff also contributes to the smooth operation of the school. Partnerships with several key community-based organizations such as the Federation of Italian American Organizations, Beacon, and Coney Island Hospital Health Center further support the needs of the students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Individual teachers do their own goal setting with students as part of conferencing. However, the use of standards-based rubrics to provide feedback to students about their work is inconsistent. There is little evidence of interim student goal setting in student work portfolios or assessment data maintained by teachers. Formal and informal observations both provide teachers with constructive feedback about their practice. However, they do not yet provide clear interim goals with benchmarks for teachers.

There is articulation between teachers and the school's partners that provide supplemental student services. The school effectively adjusts student programs, as needed, to better meet the needs of each student. The principal indicates, "we'll do anything it takes to get the student as comfortable as possible." Although, the skill of revising plans based upon interim assessment data is not fully development. Some teachers use the skills analyses provided by diagnostic tests to re-teach a topic if necessary. They try to address different learning styles and some use technology. Coaches regularly go into classrooms to model and facilitate teaching practices to better meet the needs of all students. However, differentiation is not yet consistent.

Administration emphasizes that planning cannot be from September to June, but rather from January to January. Some State assessments take place quite early in the school year, and the learning for the duration of the year must carry over and be continuous with the following school year. This annual time frame effectively positions the school to plan ahead and provide continuity of instruction. This time-frame is not in alignment with the development of the school's annual Comprehensive Education Plan.

The school assesses the achievement of goals in response to data. For example, it realigns student schedules as needed to meet their needs. There is a clear vision for continued emphasis on all student populations, particularly English language learners and special education students as the school continually strives to support continued student growth.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Seth Low Middle School	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped