



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Beacon High School

High School 479

**227 West 61st Street
New York
NY 10023**

Principal: Ruth Lacey

Dates of review: March 3 - 4, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Michael Clifford

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

Beacon High School has an enrollment of 1068 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 18% Black, 23% Hispanic, 52% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 42% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 94.8%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Staff work together in a reflective and collaborative manner and take full advantage of one another's expertise in order to improve practice.
- The principal has a clear and well-articulated vision, which is embraced by the entire school community and drives improvement efforts.
- Partnerships with a wide range of colleges, museums and other community resources significantly expand learning opportunities for students and staff.
- The school offers an extensive range of engaging curricular offerings including strong core academics, in-depth electives, and the arts.
- The school's portal provides a comprehensive and interactive collection of data over time on the progress and performance of each student.
- A pervasive communication of high expectations by school leaders and staff leads to improved results.
- The willingness of teachers and school leaders to carefully analyze and monitor interim progress ensures that timely and strategic adjustments are made.
- By providing engaging high-level instruction, constructive evaluation of student work using common rubrics, and through advisories and tutoring, teachers are fully accountable for each student's progress.
- The effective disaggregation of data enables the school to provide effective interventions to address the needs of specific student groups.
- Students and parents speak highly of the benefits afforded by a nurturing dynamic staff and the strong sense of community that defines the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Customize professional development opportunities to make differentiated instruction strategies consistent school wide.
- Expand study and organizational skills development to better support all students to meet academic challenges.
- Increase efforts to address higher than desired tardiness levels.

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 well developed.

The comprehensive way in which the school knows each student begins with a clear understanding of its incoming 9th graders and continues until graduation. The principal makes it a point to have middle school principals visit the school to observe expectations firsthand. The school's English language arts teachers in turn visit middle school English language arts classes to communicate the range of skills they expect entering students to have. Additionally, prospective students present a portfolio of work to school staff and are encouraged to attend an arts-focused "bridge" orientation program during the summer. The school continues to collect a wealth of data on students from the moment they enter the school door. The community coordinator has created a unique and comprehensive interactive software program on the school's website. This portal provides an historical record of all teachers' anecdotal progress reports written twice per year in all subject areas. It also includes a listing of class assignments, attendance records, and a student tracking system. The student portfolio center allows performance-based assessment results with standardized rubrics to clearly indicate progress. The broad functionality of the system serves to facilitate communication among teachers, students, parents, advisors and the guidance office.

A staff that, in the words of one teacher, "just roll up their sleeves and go at it" characterizes the culture of the school. There is a competitive quality among teachers to see who can do a better job. They believe that this in turn drives them to excel in the classroom. Although, a total understanding of differentiated instruction whether through content, process or product variations is inconsistent among staff. Both teachers and students are part of the hiring committee, which results in a shared sense of purpose. Students are articulate and self-aware. In class they are thoroughly engaged, offer insightful opinions and are willing to challenge one another's thinking. They stress that it is socially valued to be a good student and that the quality of instruction and personal attention motivates them "to bend over backwards to get into particular classes". While this contributes to the school's increased attendance rate, tardiness in the beginning of the day continues to be an issue. The inquiry team's focus group is a cohort of students who, though capable, are falling behind with low achievement. Their work is having a positive impact for these students because advisories now have concrete suggestions, such as emphasizing organizational skills, to reduce the disconnect between capability and achievement. The school has addressed the issues raised by the last Quality Review in an effective and purposeful manner. Rubrics are now standardized across disciplines and grades to provide students and parents with a clear and consistent understanding of what defines exemplary work and to gauge how close they are to achieving it. The school's assessment system has undergone extensive refinement and serves the students well.

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 well developed.

It is evident that school leaders and staff have built close relationships with all students and know them well both in terms of personal and academic growth. Because of a commitment to support the continuous improvement of each and every student, this school recognizes the effectiveness of gathering, continuously updating and analyzing data on their performance and progress. Recognizing the effectiveness of data as a means to improve teaching and learning, the staff spends significant time investigating and adding to the multiple sources of student information, both statistical and anecdotal, at their disposal. They have a keen interest in understanding the whole student from multiple perspectives using multiple measures in order to fully understand what progress the student is making. They delve into why or why students are not meeting expectations and what can be done to ensure they continue to make progress.

The school takes a careful look at the progress not only of individuals and the school as a whole, but at specific subgroups disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, grade, special education and English language learner categories. They became aware in one instance of the big disparity of English language arts scores achieved by 10th grade girls who achieved significantly better than 10th grade boys. Teachers then examined ways to address this result by identifying incentives to help boys improve.

Teachers are eager take advantage of training in the use of the school's data management system because they see how effective it is in efficiently accessing and adding information about specific students, subgroups, grade levels, departments, and school wide. Further, they recognize the benefits it affords them in communicating to a wide range of audiences about their students.

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 does not use a top-down approach to goal setting. Because all school constituencies are involved in the process at a variety of levels, there is a sense of ownership and empowerment by all groups. The principal has identified five school wide goals for the current school year including ways to meet individual student needs and how to define and support effective teaching. By emphasizing connecting course content and skill building to performance-based assessment standards, students more clearly understand the purpose behind class objectives. In addition, staff and school leaders collaboratively agreed upon three goals as the focus of a school improvement initiative by a consultant from the Educational Policy Improvement Center aimed at increasing the school's ability to make students college-ready. The academic standards

committee has set specific goals relating to issues such as evaluating performance-based systems, and integrating the school's standards with those of the State.

Through the individualized information contained in anecdotal comments and performance-based assessments using rubrics, each teacher is able to provide extensive and meaningful feedback to students regarding their progress and a clear record over time for parents and other teachers to observe growth. Teachers make themselves accountable for the achievement of their students in a number of ways, the effect of which is to provide a strong safety net to ensure that progress is made. This personalized attention is extended through one-to-one conversations with school leaders, and in the supportive work leading up to performance-based assessments. Parents are grateful for and sophisticated in accessing information of goals set for their children on the school's website.

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.

Teachers develop an understanding of the performance of each of their students in a multi-dimensional way. Students are supported not only in class but also through their advisories and the encouragement they receive to participate in tutoring sessions provided by teachers at least twice weekly. While school attendance has risen, the school has identified an unacceptable level of tardiness particularly at the start of the day.

Universal engagement, high-level thinking, and eloquent discussion such as an exploration of Vonnegut's narrator being "outside the novel" as he begins *Slaughterhouse Five* characterize classroom practice. This encourages students not only to engage in sophisticated analysis but also to build upon one another's thinking. Although there are examples of good differentiation, practice is not consistent, and results in an incomplete understanding of differentiated instruction in all its forms.

Teachers refer to the "dynamic curriculum" that changes based on thoughtful reflection and response to input from a variety of sources. The extensive range of courses that students may take is continuously being expanded. Electives, such as the addition of a highly sought after criminal law course, are developed based on the unique interests of teachers. Student clubs, activities and a broad range of sports teams from baseball to fencing are also created according to student requests. A wealth of opportunities includes a pervasive exposure to the arts and classes at local colleges. An extraordinary range of overseas trips including recent ones to Costa Rica and India are integrated to course themes and allow students to develop in a well-rounded way. One parent credits the school's comfortable, nurturing atmosphere "with the ability not only to identify how very different her two sons were from one another, but to help them grow in their own ways, to be challenged, and to explore the world".

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 outstanding.

It is evident that teachers value one another's expertise and as a result are eager to share best practice and work collaboratively within and across departments. Teachers meet in a variety of forums to continuously reflect upon and refine policies within the school to ensure that assessment systems are rigorous and seamlessly integrated. The school provides a multifaceted induction process for new teachers including a summer orientation program, their inclusion into the Bridge summer program for incoming 9th grade students, a mentorship program, and purposeful formation of professional development and planning groups to match new teachers with veterans. Teachers recognize the need to work collaboratively to ensure that what is taught supports work done in other classes as well as one's own. Inter-class visits are common allowing teachers to gain a new perspective and share insights.

The school is run in a highly organized manner with clearly written and communicated policies that serve to establish an orderly and well-disciplined environment. As a result, the work of the entire staff is highly efficient and student issues are addressed in a timely and effective way. The service that guidance and college counselors provide to students is valuable, continuously expanded and improved based on careful analysis of data provided through the portal. In addition, a significant number of students attend college courses and are supported by exposure to a rich variety of cultural institutions such as the film department at the Lincoln Center of the Arts and the Dance Theater Workshop.

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 well developed.

What drives the school to constantly re-examine, reflect upon, and revise school wide practices whether instructionally or in terms of policies and procedures is simply to "do what's best for the kids". Having established clear goals with identified action steps, timelines, person responsible, and resources needed, it becomes a manageable task for school leaders to check on progress and make strategic changes as necessary.

At the classroom level teachers consistently make use of portal data to compare progress of students in their own classes with how they are doing in others. This information in combination with diagnostic assessment and observational data collected in class allows teachers to make purposeful adjustments in their lessons. This careful monitoring is mirrored in the work done by school leaders to make periodic reviews of student report cards to determine what is needed to support teachers with professional development. As illustrated in well-organized data binders, clear benchmarks have been established throughout the year to allow school leaders to track progress toward reaching school wide goals. It is evident that the principal continuously collects new data from all groups within the school community to help establish next year's goals based on progress made during the current year and new challenges identified.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Beacon High 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