



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**High School for Violin and Dance**

**High School 543  
1100 Boston Road  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Tanya John**

**Dates of review: February 26 - 27, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Jo Cheadle**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The School for Violin and Dance is a high school with 200 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 36.5% Black, 62.5% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 11.5% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 10% of the students enrolled and girls account for 90%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 was 81%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 88% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's inspirational leadership, supported by a very able assistant principal, ensures that all members of staff share the school vision totally.
- Teachers set very precise individual goals for students and communicate these goals very effectively to parents and students.
- Leaders and faculty have an exceptional knowledge of each individual student and use this knowledge to target interventions very effectively.
- Leaders have an excellent understanding of the school's past performance and accurately measure progress towards long-term goals.
- Staff work in a highly collegiate manner, ensuring a common commitment to whole school success.
- The school's climate for learning is built on utmost respect and professionalism and adults are excellent role models for students.
- Leaders use financial resources very wisely and pay excellent heed to the generation of finance from additional sources to achieve school goals.
- Opportunities for professional development are outstanding and arise from a secure understanding of where strengths and weaknesses lie.
- Links with a range of partners superbly support students' academic, personal and social development.
- Strategic planning for improvement is excellent and underpins the school's continuous growth.

### What the school needs to improve

- Pay close and continuous attention to the performance of English language learners to ensure they make steady gains in learning in all subjects.
- Ensure that teachers make consistent and effective use of data to match work to student needs in all lessons.
- Encourage greater innovation in the development of the curriculum to further engage and motivate students in their learning.

## 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.**

From the moment that visitors enter the High School for Violin and Dance, it is obvious that good relationships are highly valued. The school's mission is to prepare a diverse group of students to be intelligent, caring leaders in society. To this end, the principal leads her staff in exemplifying respectful, professional attitudes and establishing a tremendous atmosphere of team spirit. Her insightful and intelligent leadership encourages adults in the school to be excellent role models for students. The assistant principal complements the work of the principal very successfully. Members of staff greatly admire these two leaders. In turn, leaders openly celebrate the skills and knowledge of the staff community. It has taken time to achieve stability among staff, but leaders are delighted that the team is now a strong faculty of capable, committed and hard working individuals. The principal and other members of staff have their roots in the local community. They understand intrinsically the needs of the student population. They are fully aware that learning must motivate and inspire. The school believes that everything is possible for students by "planning collaboratively, being positive and providing opportunities". Leaders and faculty embrace highlighted areas for development, recognizing that action planning to address these points moves the school ever closer towards their vision of excellence. Extremely high levels of self-reflection, adaptability and long-term strategic thinking are driving the school forward very effectively. The school has a deep-seated desire to improve that has brought about good progress since the last Quality Review. Leaders have worked determinedly to ensure that data is used effectively to drive instruction, meet the needs of all students and encourage engagement in learning. Progress has been good, but leaders and staff rightly strive for even greater success.

The inquiry team's work supports the school's progress successfully. Leaders have established where student outcomes have improved. However, they are quick to identify where progress is not good enough and have targeted achievement in science and social studies for further development. The team has selected a group of students who are struggling to reach the expected 80-85% pass rates. There are ongoing adaptations to the school's assessment procedures to establish rigor and regularity in the collection of vital information about student progress. Team members are learning from other successful study programs, such as the AVID program, Advancement via Individual Determination, and using successful strategies to influence future intervention. Their work is supporting professional development for staff and effective use of data to ensure a better match of work to student need. Leaders and faculty recognize that they have further work to do if learning and the curriculum are to be wholly appropriate for all students and encourage consistently good rates of progress.

## **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.**

Leaders and staff have an excellent knowledge of individual students. Their awareness is aided greatly by the fact that the school is small, but even so, adults go out of their way to really know students well and understand their needs fully. The school's data set has improved significantly and is now very comprehensive. Though boys are few in number, leaders know that they do well here and substantiate reasons with clear evidence. Through regular analysis by the special education team leader, the school has a very clear understanding of the progress made by special education students. Scantron and Acuity data has supported much improved information for this student group in particular. Data is also disaggregated by ethnicity, socio-economic context and for English language learners. A class before school serves students in grades 9 and 10 and goes some way to meeting the needs of the group. Leaders recognize however, that rates of progress for English language learners generally need improvement. When students start at the school, early identification of specific levels of language acquisition is not robust enough to ensure student needs are immediately addressed. Moreover, ongoing monitoring of the group's performance is not regular enough to ascertain that progress is consistent and steady. It is now obvious to leaders that some students do not achieve well enough in other areas of learning because the fundamental development of English language skills has not been supported well enough over time.

Leaders establish trends and conclusions because they carry out excellent analysis of the school's past and ongoing performance. There is a clear understanding of past results and a moving picture of how the school is changing as a result of renewed rigor for academic learning. Leaders want to close gaps and move students forward quickly and therefore all students receive additional support in after-school sessions. These sessions also serve the higher achieving students. Results in math Regents exams have consequently improved. Leaders are anxious to be ever more "smart" in their use of data. Continued in-house training for staff is honing analytical skills and influencing data use. Data collection and analysis does not only focus on academic success however. Leaders closely observe outcomes that relate to student motivation, positive attitudes and respectful behaviour. Good levels of attendance of students and staff are a key indicator for the school.

**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 outstanding.**

Effective data analysis leads to the establishment of extremely relevant whole-school goals that leaders communicate to teachers extremely clearly. This knowledge of school-wide priorities guides teachers in setting challenging and very appropriate targets for individual students because they fully understand that classroom practice influences whole school success. Levels of collaboration at the school are extremely

high. Teachers work together efficiently to discuss areas of student need and establish clear timeframes for outcomes. Leaders communicate the drive to improve standards by “bumping up expectations”. A good example of this is the preparation work carried out for science Regents exams. For the first time, leaders and teachers have identified areas of development for particular students in science and devised clear plans to guide them towards success. This has involved professional development opportunities for staff, including the opportunity to share lesson planning, and the very innovative use of student tutors. Students who show particular aptitude in the subject are supporting other students via a sensitively orchestrated process of paired work, revision and accuracy checking. Outcomes have so far been very positive and identified students are generally making better progress.

Students have an exceptionally clear understanding of what they must do to improve. They know that expectations about work and effort are very high. One student commented that teachers are “always at your back”, checking that enough is being done to reach the goals set that are set for them. Their knowledge of “next steps” is enhanced using a computerized information system called TeacherEaze. Students access independently their own portfolio of information, detailing a continuously updated record of marks, assignments completed and work outstanding. Most importantly, the system allows teachers to record comments on past assignments, including very clear targets for improvement. Students refer to these targets to work on their next assignment. Parents have access to the system and many now have a very good understanding of what their child must do to improve. They are very appreciative of this very useful information system. The school values parental involvement very highly and this is a good example of how their participation is encouraged.

**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.**

The school has a suitable core curriculum that facilitates ongoing formative assessment of student progress. Assessment forces continuous adaptations to the curriculum plan to assure long-term sustainable success. The challenge to meet the needs of higher achieving students, for example, led to the establishment of advanced math courses and high student outcomes. A very specialized program for dance and violin tuition supplements the core curriculum. All students in grade 9 participate in the dance and violin program. They either major in one of the two subjects for the remainder of their time at the school, or decide to choose both disciplines if they have particularly strong skills. This is a unique opportunity for many students who have never experienced dance and instrumental tuition before high school. Additional learning opportunities also include a college preparation course that develops higher level thinking skills and artistic expression, in addition to the AVID program. As a small school, finances are tight. It is due to the principal’s wisdom in the use of resources that courses such as these run at the school and teachers are supported in delivering them effectively. Moreover, she is tenacious in securing additional funds through grant applications that supplement resources and additional programs. The school’s desire to improve student engagement further means that the need to focus on curriculum content is taken very seriously. Staff understand the range of student achievement, personal interests and learning styles. They are working hard to match work consistently well to meet individual needs and

ensure the curriculum enthralls and motivates learning. Leaders are acutely aware that these are still key areas for improvement, but are convinced that the team has the capacity to succeed. High levels of mutual professional respect support this belief. Teachers are very motivated to do well and recognize their accountability to students. They agree, "If students haven't learned it, we haven't taught it". This also depends on students' good attendance. Students are clear about the expectations, saying, "Someone turns up at your door if you're not here". Attendance has improved at least 1% per year in the last few years.

**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.**

The school provides extremely good opportunities for teachers to develop their professional skills and knowledge. Through meetings with individual teachers three times each year, plus informal but very regular observation of teaching and learning, leaders know staff strengths very well. They are also very well informed regarding areas for development. Staff sincerely welcome the "glows and grows" feedback they receive and relish the chance to observe colleagues' lessons and share good practice. Often this is completely self-initiated. Many members of staff request that leaders observe their teaching regularly. This epitomizes the staff's desire to be the best teachers they can be. The appointment process for new teachers is particularly stringent. Applicants are required to teach a demonstration lesson, receive feedback and then teach another lesson to show that they have heeded advice. New teachers receive ample support to reach the high expectations leaders establish. The school's links with a range of partners not only support further staff development, but also students' academic, social and personal progress. Partnership with Bronx Cares for example, encourages support for the social and emotional needs of students and their families. This has led to lower suspension numbers.

**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 outstanding.**

Very good analysis of data empowers leaders to make extremely informed decisions about whole-school goals and devise very effective strategic plans for improvement. The school is highly self-reflective and leaders and faculty question themselves continually. Levels of consultation are superb and, as the principal says, "Plans just get better the more others are involved in them". The school's self-evaluation form prepared for the Quality Review exemplifies excellent skills in "knowing and understanding oneself", and indicates the reasons behind the schools continuing development and success. Excellent use is made of periodic and formal assessment to inform the self-evaluation cycle. Teachers fully recognize their role in reestablishing whole-school goals and working to improve their practice to ensure agreed outcomes. The school's vision is established excellently, very tangible in reality and drives all school planning and decision-making.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The High School for Violin and Dance</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>					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.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?					<b>X</b>
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					<b>X</b>
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?					<b>X</b>
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>