



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The High School for Contemporary Arts

High School 544

**800 East Gun Hill Road
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Francisco Sanchez

Dates of review: November 19 - 20, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Bruce Berry

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The High School for Contemporary Arts is a high school with 433 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 48% Black, 50% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 7.7% English language learners and 13.2% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 90.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 80% eligibility.

The school shares the building with a number of other schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's dynamic and all-embracing leadership is driving the vision of high achievement for every student.
- The senior leaders and teachers work impressively as a unified team to support the students' learning.
- The school has excellent data systems, which are used well for tracking the progress of each student, classroom and subject.
- There are excellent programs in the school for supporting the academic progress of special education students, English language learners and other students in need of improvement.
- Parents, students and staff share very high expectations for the achievement of the students.
- The excellent curriculum, including an impressive range of arts subjects, creates challenge and interest for the students' learning.
- There is a highly respectful and caring culture throughout the school community.
- The high-quality guidance and advisory services are giving valuable support for the students' academic and social well being.
- The excellent partnerships and school trips provide high-quality opportunities to extend the students' academic, cultural and life experiences.

What the school needs to improve

- Further extend the use of the school's extensive data system to provide a regular analysis of the progress in achievement of all subgroups in the school.
- Improve the consistency of the differentiation of instruction and classroom activities in order to match them to the individual learning needs of the students.
- Enhance strategic planning by using more specifically defined interim goals in order to monitor the progress in achieving the school's long-term goals.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Since the last Quality Review, the school has made good progress in the use of data to monitor student progress and developed an excellent peer assessment program. It has made less progress in monitoring the progress of different sub groups in the school and in the differentiation of instructional practices.

The principal's dynamic leadership has transformed the culture of the school over the past two years. As a result, the school's first graduation class achieved very high levels of success in 2007. The school has created effective data systems for tracking the students' progress in their achievement levels. The administration and the teachers are a united team, which promotes high levels of motivation and enthusiasm from the students for their learning. The excellent curriculum, including strong arts content, gives good challenge and high interest for the students' academic and cultural development. The school has a calm and respectful culture, which allows the highly motivated students to grow academically and socially. The parents are fully engaged by the school and are kept very well informed of their children's progress through the excellent communications provided by the school. The extensive partnerships the school has developed provide effective support for the students within and beyond the school day. There is not, at present, consistency in the differentiation of instruction to meet the individual educational needs of each student. The school sets annual challenging goals for improving student achievement, but does not yet set interim goals to monitor the progress made in reaching long-term goals. The inquiry team has made good progress and is focusing its research project on achievement in mathematics.

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.

The school uses their excellent data systems extremely well to track the progress in achievement of each student, classroom and subject. Teachers have received thorough training in the use of data in order to plan their instruction. Each student has a valuable graphical picture of their progress to date and the courses they still require as they move towards graduation. The data for each student in the 2008 graduation class is on display in the principal's office and students regularly visit him to check their progress.

The marking period grades are used well to monitor the students' progress in accumulating credits in classrooms and subjects. The combination of student, classroom and subject data shows a consistently high level of achievement across the school. Special education students receive high-quality support in self-contained and collaborative classes. Monthly reviews demonstrate that students make very good progress in their achievement levels. English language learners receive effective support for their learning and make excellent progress in their levels of achievement. The specific skills in need of improvement for each of the students are identified using regular diagnostic tests. The students receive good support in addressing these areas of improvement in the school day, after-school and in Saturday programs.

The data systems are used extremely well to track the progress of each cohort of students as they move through the school. The school had its first graduating class in 2007 and achieved commendably high graduation rates. It has an excellent record of student progress when compared to that of similar schools. Annual data is used to compare the progress made by students in different ethnic groups and by gender. The school's data systems are not, at present, used to provide a regularly updated analysis of the progress in achievement of all the sub groups in 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 well developed.

Staff work effectively together to set challenging subject and whole school goals for improving the achievement of the students. Every teacher reviews the progress of their students on a regular basis and sets classroom goals for improving their achievement. The teachers then collaborate well to create achievable and challenging subject goals. Student goals for improvement are carefully aligned to their progress in gaining credits and passing Regents tests. "We empower the students" is how one teacher describes the ownership and determination the students have in reaching their goals. Whole school goals are shared with the school community through the school leadership team and the parents' association meetings. There are excellent programs in the school for supporting the academic progress of the students in greatest need of improvement. They make impressive gains in achievement through their individual programs, which include after-school and Saturday school support. The senior students provide invaluable tutoring for the at-risk students in order to help them with their learning.

"We find ways to create success. There is no time for excuses for failure." is how one teacher describes the culture of high expectations for the achievement of the students in the school. The principal, teachers, students and parents share very high expectations that all students will achieve graduation. There are excellent communications between the school and the parents. Parents receive regular updates on the progress their children are making. The principal meets with all the graduating grade students and their parents to discuss progress and their goals for the future. The school has great success in engaging parental interest in their child's education. For example, over 300 parents attended a recent parent and teacher conference. Parents receive a regular newsletter and have a series of useful workshops covering many areas, including the curriculum, test preparation and college financial aid.

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 well-constructed curriculum provides challenge and interest for the students’ learning. The school follows the mandated curriculum and has a highly effective arts program. In grade 9, the English language arts and mathematics teachers work as a team to provide interesting project based instruction in the two subjects. The College Summit program is an excellent addition to the curriculum for the students. It provides students with the skills needed to obtain a place at college and teaches them strategies to ensure they have a successful experience once they get there. The arts program provides high-quality interest and variety for the students’ learning both within and beyond the school day. The program includes art, dance, music, learning to play instruments and video production. The black box theatre allows students to experience all the different aspects of theatre life including acting, staging, lighting and directing.

Teachers provide high levels of interest and engagement for the students in their classroom instruction. Senior leaders monitor instruction on a regular basis and have discussions with teachers about the progress their students are making. The grading policy provides consistency in assessments of students’ learning and the students have a full understanding of the process. There is not, at present, consistency in the use of differentiated instruction and classroom activities in order to match the individual learning needs of the students. Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are used well to support the curriculum and instruction in the school. The College Summit program and team teaching in grade 9 are some examples of the excellent use of resources in supporting the students’ learning. The budget is used to support after school activities, with every teacher running an after school club for the students. There is an exceptional culture of respect in the school. “We are like a giant family” is how one student described the school. The parents, students, teachers and administration all work in harmony to achieve the best outcomes for the students. Senior students provide tutoring and mentoring for other students. The students’ interest and determination to succeed is further illustrated by the high levels of attendance in the school.

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.

Senior leaders check the quality of the instruction through daily walkthroughs of classrooms. Teachers get valuable feedback and support for areas identified as being in need of improvement. The focus of the effective professional development program is on improving the instruction in the classroom. The teachers’ training programs are generated from the outcomes of classroom walkthroughs and from the analysis of data. Following each training session, senior leaders visit classrooms to check its impact on the instruction. The early finish for students on Fridays gives the teachers excellent opportunities to work in teams to plan curriculum and instruction. They use the opportunity well to study the student assessment data and to set goals for improving the

students' achievement levels. Teachers regularly observe each other's instruction in order to share good practice and ideas. A new guidance counselor has good support from a mentor and a smaller workload to help with the settling in process.

The excellent guidance services in the school give valuable support to help the students' with their academic and social development. The guidance counselors and youth development officer encourage the students to take responsibility for making the most of their own education. They act as effective advocates for the students on issues ranging from family issues to counseling on adolescent related problems. The senior students help the new students by being big brother or big sister buddies to them. The school has excellent procedures, which create a calm and well-disciplined environment for effective learning to take place. The students, parents and teachers have high praise for the way the principal has transformed the school over the past two years. "The children are interested in school again and results have improved tenfold" is how one parent describes the positive changes in the school culture. The school has many excellent partnerships and school trips, which give invaluable opportunities for the students to expand their academic, cultural and life experiences. The school's partners provide high quality after school programs and opportunities for the students to gain experience of college life. They provide mentors to support the students and create internship opportunities to give them experience of life in the world of work. The link with the Apollo Theater gave a superb venue for the graduation ceremony for the students in 2007. The principal is planning to extend that experience by having both students and parents receive an award together to celebrate the students' graduation.

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.

The school has effective plans and goals in place for improving student outcomes. All the students have a graduation plan, which is negotiated and agreed with the students and their parents. Teachers regularly review the plans and revise them to take account of the updated achievements of the students. The school makes appropriate plans and sets annual goals for improving teacher outcomes. The plans do not, at present, contain specifically defined interim goals in order to monitor the progress in achieving the school's long-term goals. Senior leaders and teachers monitor student progress on a regular basis. They revise their instruction effectively and plan interventions to meet the changing academic needs of the students. The teachers use the New Visions data to review regularly each student's progress in meeting their graduation plan. They use the information to revise the student's program when needed.

School leaders focus effectively on the progress in achievement of individual students. However, they do not consistently monitor the progress made in achieving long-term plans and goals at whole school and subject levels. There is a collaborative approach to annually reviewing plans and goals. The senior leaders and the teachers work well together to review the impact of the curriculum and instruction on the achievement of the students. They then prepare curriculum maps and pacing calendars for the next academic year. The school has risen from adversity to success in the space of two years. The whole school community embraces the vision of high achievement for every student which underpins the school's practice.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: The High School for Contemporary Arts (X544) | 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 demanding, 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? | | | | 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? | | | | 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 make 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 | | |