



YCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

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

High School 547

**701 St Ann's Avenue
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Denise Simone

Dates of review: May 29 - 30, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Francesca Peña

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The New Explorers High School for Film and Humanities serves 319 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 37% Black, 60% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 82.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 81% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a charismatic leader who communicates and lives her vision of the school in her daily interactions with students, staff and visitors.
- Data is gathered and used carefully to understand and evaluate the performance of individual students.
- The film-based curriculum and effective use of technology are used effectively to broaden and engage students' interest.
- The school has created effective partnerships that support the academic and personal growth of the students.
- The promotion of a positive learning environment through project base learning fosters personal, social and academic development.
- Teachers are given ample opportunities to improve their skills through good use of common planning time and monthly professional development.
- Regular assessments are used well to make timely adjustments to procedures and academic interventions.
- There are good levels of mutual trust and respect, ensuring that students are very respectful, well motivated and very engaged in their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Carefully analyze and interpret data to measure the progress of English language learners.
- Use data consistently and effectively in all subjects to plan differentiated instruction that matches students' academic needs.
- Ensure that there are consistently high expectations for student in all subjects.
- Set clear and measurable goals to improve students' progress for classes and subjects, and build in regular points when these can be evaluated.
- Develop strategies to identify and tackle issues of poor attendance and involve parents more actively in the process.
- Identify and share with the students and their parents, the small next steps that are needed to achieve their children's long-term goals.

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.

Since the arrival of the current principal just over a year ago, the school has made great strides to improve the school's academic program. A key component is the integration of film, photography, and technology across the curriculum, delivered through a project-based learning model. Parents and students appreciate the variety of ways in which the school tailors the learning experience for practical application in the world of film. Good partnerships have been made with organizations to encourage and raise skills in filmmaking. The school also developed a life skills class allowing all students contact with a specific adult to gain academic support as well as additional guidance. Leaders use their evaluations of regular periodic assessments to measure the impact of programs and strategies, and make adaptations as necessary. The school does not have enough effective procedures in place to reduce student absence.

Supported by the work of the assistant principal, the school is gathering a good deal of valuable data that teachers use well at individual student level to target improvement. The school needs to break down this data further to evaluate the achievement and progress of English language learners. Leaders give insufficient emphasis to setting clear and measurable goals for classes and subjects, and building in regular points when they evaluate progress towards these. The school is effective in targeting those students most in need of improvement, or close to grade level, and there are good systems in place to track their progress and achievement. With these students, teachers make good use of class level data to differentiate instruction and plan interventions. The detailed work of the Inquiry team is leading the school in this field. This is an area of significant improvement since the last review.

The high levels of respect among all members of the faculty and student body leads to a very calm working environment and ideal conditions for learning. While across the school there are examples of good instructional practice, not all teachers have the same high expectations for student outcomes that translate into effective teaching strategies to promote good progress. Where instruction is effective, the thoughtful use of data is clearly seen in the quality of the differentiation of the tasks for students, the pace of the lesson and the probing nature of teachers' questions. This is not yet being sufficiently well disseminated across the school. While the school gives teachers good opportunities to improve their skills through the effective use of common planning time and monthly professional development, supervisors do not devote enough time to individualized coaching and strategic feedback. Teachers have some opportunities to observe each other but the school does not capitalizing current best practice, such as in the humanities department to benefit teachers of all subjects.

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.

The school uses a wide range of timely data to evaluate overall trends in students' achievement and progress. Leaders use this information effectively to identify those groups whose progress is giving concern, which they subsequently target for improvement. The school has made good progress over the year in collecting together past and current data, and generating a considerable bank of new data. Leaders are now able to compare the performances of all students, classes and grades. These comparisons include individual subject scholarship cohort performance and the data from newly introduced strategies, such as those for improving reading and writing. The data team conducted an analysis of all grade 11 and 12 students that needed to take and pass the English Regents. The team developed an action plan that resulted in 74.6% of these students passing the English Regents in January 2008. However, this data analysis is not as rigorously applied in the mathematics department.

Many teachers are gaining in confidence in their ability to produce data and to understand how it can be used most effectively. The principal and assistant principal, with the assistance of grade team leaders, have been very pro-active in the introduction of new academic programs as a result of data analysis. The school has created an all male and female advisory class in grade 9 and grade 12 to investigate the impact of single sex instruction on the achievement of male students. While they have a clear baseline starting point, the lack of comparable data from the other mixed-gender classes currently makes it difficult to objectively evaluate the impact of this initiative. The tracking of special education students is a stronger feature, as is the tracking and targeting of those students just below grade level. However, leaders do not carry out careful analysis and interpretation of data for English language learners, to identify trends and tackle differentials in progress as necessary.

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 proficient.

There are good procedures for the identification of students in greatest need of improvement. Using the outcomes of periodic assessment data, identified students are targeted and encouraged to attend after school tutoring and credit recovery sessions. The school's inquiry team has made good use of collected data to carry out regular reviews of student performance and set goals for improvement. This group has provided a forum for whole school goal setting and self-evaluation. The team has communicated information from its review to the whole school community to ensure that all staff share improvement goals. Goals are set for college readiness and pass rates in Regents exams. The area of greatest need has been identified as improving the reading and writing skills of all students. The principal has rightly addressed the situation in a variety of ways, such as creating double periods of English in the 9th grade and has integrated

the arts class with literacy where students are given the opportunity to reflect, create, research, and visualize sequence of both text and image.

While the school is committed to student progress and achievement, it has not yet engaged students and their parents in the goal setting process. Parental contribution to support student learning has been limited. The school is instilling in students the desire to do well, but cannot always guarantee that parents are able to support the realization of this desire at home. For this reason, the pupil personnel team works to ensure that “in-house” strategies support the progress made by particular groups of students who may otherwise “slip through the net”.

Whole-school targets are set but some groups lack the detailed information required for effective planning. Nevertheless, teachers make effective use of the available data to plan their instruction to align with the needs of their students.

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 proficient.

School data has indicated widespread reading and writing weaknesses in students entering the school in grade 9. This has led to several new strategies, especially designed to raise achievement in English language arts and support the schools improvement plans. This has resulted in a steady acceleration in student learning. The school uses film and photography to enhance its curriculum and engage its students through project-based instruction. This program provides good quality curriculum opportunities for students to experience high levels of academic challenge and rigor in their learning. The students have shown films at Tribeca Film Festival, and Lincoln Center, as well as many other venues throughout the city.

There are good relationships throughout the school between staff and students. Students are well engaged in their learning. They appreciate especially the efforts of staff to prepare them for the future, and the many opportunities they have for counselling and mentoring with trusted adults. The budget is used efficiently; however, there is no budget manager and responsibilities generally fall to the assistant principal, allowing little time for her to support the principal in the supervision and support of teachers.

Student attendance is a continual problem for the school. The attendance team is aware of patterns of student absence and work constantly to make improvements. However, different teachers have different approaches to the way they keep in contact with parents and not all are as successful in increasing attendance.

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 proficient.

The principal uses the results of her regular formal and frequent informal, classroom observations in a variety of ways to improve instruction. Oral and written feedback identifies common areas for development that then form part of regular agenda items discussed in meetings. However, the observations focus too much on the teachers' performance and not enough on the assessed outcomes for students. There is no explicit link made between the two elements of the process. Nevertheless, the information from these and the analysis of data is used well to inform good quality professional development. This is planned and managed well by the administration and the grade team leaders. Along with this, the weekly common planning time now provides greater opportunity for detailed professional discussions around grade and department developments. Teachers can make better use of the open-door arrangement for classroom inter-visitations. The alliance with the Ghetto Film School, the strong partnership with New Visions and New Leaders for New Schools, and the Bronx Integrated Service Center have enhanced the school professional development, strengthened school curriculum and hence student engagement.

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 schools' long-term goals are clearly thought out, continue to raise expectations and challenge all members of the learning community to improve student learning. This is the aspect of the school's work that is driving the improvements seen since the previous Quality Review and beginning to influence progress in all other areas of the school's work. School planning is clearly based around these goals. Plans are well considered, but some elements still lack the measurable outcomes and timeframes necessary to identify when the school is successful. There is a cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation that drives the strategic processes in the school. There is not, as yet, a collective ownership and accountability in the process by some teachers. This hinders student progress and the school's ability to meet goals for accelerated learning.

The work of the principal and assistant principal in using data analysis to drive forward performance is beginning to show clear improvements in school achievements. Using data has produced an array of initiatives and interventions that are beginning to yield significant improvement in some groups of students, particularly in the area of English language arts. Interim and final assessments of students' performance are used to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to improve achievement. However, this diagnostic approach to student performance does not permeate all levels of the school. At the individual student and classroom level, data is not usually generated to give an accurate record of the development of students' skills and understanding. An exception to this is the evaluation of intervention strategies for students at risk of falling behind, where a closer oversight is kept of their progress.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: The new Explorers High School for Film and Humanities | 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 | | |

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