

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Secondary School of Law

High School 462

237 7th Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11215

Principal: Larry Woodbridge

Dates of review: May 12 - 13, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Sara Carvajal

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Secondary School of Law is a high school with 580 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 58% Black, 30% Hispanic, 7% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 42% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 85.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 67% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The leadership team has developed an impacting force for continued school improvement. The principal's positive attitude and strategic decisions, fully embraced by staff and parents, are driving the focused vision at the site. Teachers feel inspired to learn from one another on how to best support individualized student learning. Parents are seeking out ways to increase their involvement in school planning and other volunteer opportunities. Students express a high level of pride for their school and an even greater appreciation for the continual individual academic and personal support they receive.

Through regular gathering and analysis of a wide range of relevant data, school leaders and faculty have a solid understanding of individual, sub-group, and subject area performance. The school uses this data to inform instructional and organizational adjustment. All stakeholders share high expectations for improving student academic achievement and personal success. However, the school has not yet embedded a systematic structure for setting next-step learning goals so that students can explain what they are aiming for and what they need to do to improve. In addition, the school does not consistently provide students and their families with interim checkpoints to ensure effective ongoing communication regarding student academic progress.

The principal and faculty work as a united team to foster a calm, respectful and orderly environment, which enables students to do their best. In addition, the curriculum offers a wide range of experiences and choice during regular and extended day programming to facilitate students' ownership of learning. Through these opportunities, the staff strive to ensure that students are well prepared for college. However, all teachers in the school do not yet demonstrate that they differentiate instruction well enough so that lessons challenge each student at the appropriate level; and the range of tasks accommodates different learning styles.

Teachers profit from an assortment of professional development opportunities to exchange and develop strengths as individuals and teams within the teaching community. However, the school lacks a systematized structure for evaluating how teacher goals and professional development impact on student achievement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty have an ongoing understanding of individual, sub-group, and subject area data, which informs instruction and organizational adjustment.
- All stakeholders share high expectations for improving student academic achievement and personal success.
- The curriculum offers a wide range of experiences and choice during regular and extended day programming to facilitate students' ownership of learning.
- The principal and faculty work as a united team to nurture a calm, respectful and orderly environment for accelerated learning to take place.
- Professional growth is a high priority so the reflective faculty profit from an assortment of venues to exchange and develop strengths as individuals and teams within the teaching community.
- The principal's positive leadership, which staff and parents fully embrace, is driving the focused vision for accelerated academic excellence.

What the school needs to improve

- Systematize interim benchmark checkpoints for students and their families to facilitate improved communication regarding student academic progress.
- Structure processes for the consistent setting of differentiated next-step learning goals for individuals so that students can articulate these clearly.
- Promote greater consistency in differentiated instruction based on data so that lesson planning reflects purposeful groupings.
- Refine all goal-setting and individual professional growth plans across the school, so that they clearly detail measurable interim checkpoints with assigned responsibilities for actions and monitoring.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The leadership and faculty use a wide range of data in order to have an ongoing understanding of student performance. Most notably, the school utilizes a "cut and credit" system that aligns student absence with credit accumulation. This enables school leaders to program students for credit recovery efficiently. In addition, the school has solid structures for monitoring class failures and Regents achievement by cohort in order to identify students for either academic intervention programming or enrichment activities. As a result, there has been a steady increase in the number of students graduating within four years.

The collected data is analyzed deeply by school leaders and faculty through several venues. During weekly grade team meetings, teachers discuss students who exhibit academic or personal barriers across classes. In this way, the teacher teams collaboratively strategize for consistent support for the identified students. Monthly departmental meetings, pupil personnel committee sessions and attendance team meetings are other forums where staff uses data effectively to determine how to best support students. Consequently, leadership and faculty are observing a shift from predominately needing to offer intervention services to increasing enrichment opportunities. More students have become motivated to pursue college-level courses while still enrolled at the site as they prepare for post-secondary studies.

Most families are extremely pleased with the way that the school celebrates the students' successes and communicates their areas of weakness, such as credit deficiencies. However, the school does not yet demonstrate that it has a systematic interim progress report structure for all students to keep families informed of their children's academic progress throughout the year.

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.

The school consistently declares its high expectations for success in a variety of ways. Students are exposed to ongoing reminders through bulletin boards, which promote and celebrate exceptional attendance records, honor roll participation and students of the month. Hallway showcases of college preparatory programs, student acceptance at colleges and student council milestones are additional student-centered initiatives that advertise the focus on achievement. As a result, students feel that their school "recognizes their accomplishments and pushes to help them secure their future" instead of simply highlighting their weaknesses.

Parents keep informed about school-wide data, goals and upcoming activities through the principal's monthly newsletter and parent-teacher association meetings. The Phonemaster system supports these communiqués by providing all parents with periodic telephone updates on assessment calendars and deadlines on school requirements. Consequently, parental involvement is steadily increasing, and relationships are gradually blossoming between assorted faculty and the new wave of parents that is acclimating itself as part of the school leadership.

The leadership team has worked diligently to initiate a goal-setting structure for students. The principal recognizes that establishing goals "must involve choice" for both students and teachers. The school has provided extensive support for teachers to help the goal-setting process evolve. As a result, many teachers have shifted from settling on behavioral and attendance goals to focusing on goals that are embedded in curriculum skills and content. Across subject areas, students and teachers are digging deeper with a lens for the important content and skills that are essential to increasing achievement in classroom assessments as well as the Regents exams. Similarly, ongoing individual mini-conferences with students contribute greatly to the success of reflective goal setting at the school. During these personal conversations, teachers probe students for subject matter they have mastered and where they remain deficient, all in a non-intrusive manner. However, teachers and administrators recognize that goal setting at the site continues to be a work in progress. Everyone admits that the student role needs to evolve further so that all students are able to articulate their learning plans confidently.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's rich curriculum offers core subject instruction plus a wide range of experiences and choice during the regular school day. Drama and visual art instruction strives to reinforce concepts that students learn in history and global studies classes. Newly added classes, such as biochemistry and honors math, offer students college-level material and the prospect of an advanced Regents diploma. Partnership with a local law firm supplements the school's law instruction by affording students live courtroom observations and engaging mock trials that "nurture interest" for that field. In addition, the school offers extended day instruction to students who require extra support with English language arts, social studies and living environment classes. Another thriving after-school intervention measure is an aggressive credit recovery program that supports students to graduate with their intended cohort. As a result, the number of students able to graduate with their respective cohort is steadily increasing.

These academic opportunities function successfully because the principal and faculty work as a united team to maintain a calm, respectful and orderly environment. All departments influence the smooth running of the school, helping the administration think through and solve school-wide and student-specific behavioral concerns. In addition, school leadership recognizes teachers as professionals who should own the curriculum. Therefore, the principal has provided an ongoing plethora of resources so that the faculty maps the curriculum across grades and subject areas, and in addition, explores strategies for differentiated instruction. One result of this arduous work is that students observe their teachers "are pretty strong in the classroom" because they "don't just ramble on" and instead seek to connect the students with the subject matter.

Whereas effective differentiated instruction is supporting students throughout pockets of the site, the school does not yet demonstrate consistency in using data for individualized

instruction. Differentiated instruction does not always reflect purposeful groupings and tasks do not always accommodate different learning styles.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Professional development is a high priority at the school. Therefore, the administrative team uses a carefully crafted assessment tool that guides their conversations with teachers throughout the formal observation process. The highlight of the resource is that it provides teachers with a self-assessment that supports them in reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, in identifying their goals for the year.

In addition, the principal strategically employs a balance of outside consultants from AUSSIE and in-house experts to provide the faculty with varied, inquiry-driven learning opportunities. Weekly common-planning times, inquiry team meetings and lab-site sessions, throughout the year, enable teachers to learn strategies that will help them implement the school vision. Additionally, administrators and teachers exchange and develop their strengths as individuals and teams within the teaching community. For example, the principal has developed a solid in-house inquiry team that utilizes its focus on grade 9 math to model effective, ongoing data analysis as it impacts on focused instruction for the rest of the faculty at the site. As a result, the school community is growing sharper in data collection and analysis, goal setting for students and differentiating instruction for students.

Despite the leadership team's current structure that engages teachers in consistent reflective practice, the school does not yet demonstrate that the individual professional growth plans include detailed measurable interim checkpoints, which include conversations regarding the direct impact of professional development on student outcomes.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

All stakeholders embrace the principal's vision for academic excellence. The entire school community applauds the principal's steady strides in overhauling the school culture and raising academic expectations through a consistently positive attitude and well-informed strategic decision-making. In particular, parents, students and teachers are grateful for the leadership team's ongoing reflections and modifications to programming and operations in order to improve school safety. The decreasing number of disciplinary incidents has enabled students to focus on instruction and, consequently, increase their credit accumulation rate and overall achievement across subject areas.

The reflections revealed in the pre-review school self-evaluation demonstrate the leadership team's solid ability to visualize and plan for continued school improvement. Using a wide range of data, the team worked well to construct a critical view of the school's current resources and practices. Moreover, the cabinet successfully identified a set of practical steps the school needs to take to achieve the next level of success.

Despite its shared vision and reflective lens, the school does not yet demonstrate a cohesive system of goal-setting checkpoints for students or teachers so that these may check in on their responsibilities for action and monitor their own growth.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Secondary School of Law	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?		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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X					
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X				
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?		X					
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed