



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Secondary School for Journalism

Middle - High School 463

**237 7th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11215**

Principal: Abbie Reif

Dates of review: December 8 - 9, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Corinne Brown

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Secondary School for Journalism is a middle-high school with 540 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 44% Black, 45% Hispanic, 5% White, 1% American Indian and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 38% of the students enrolled and girls account for 62%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 90.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

The school shares the building with two other schools, including facilities such as the cafeteria and gymnasium. The Secondary School for Journalism has its own computer lab but teachers share classrooms as space is limited.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

This small school has developed over recent years into a cohesive, collaborative community, characterized by positive relationships, which has already demonstrated its capacity to improve under the strong leadership of the principal. As one parent rightly said, "We've come a long way from four years ago. There's been a lot of improvement." Teachers show passion for their subjects; they motivate students with increasing use of interdisciplinary links and hands-on activities, and offer varied ways of experiencing success. These approaches successfully reinforce understanding and engage students in learning. The many English language learners and special education students are integrated successfully and benefit from instruction suited to their needs. Leaders and faculty continue to hone their use of data analysis through synthesizing collection systems, but recognize the value of centralizing all information into one accessible source. The administration and faculty set subject and grade level goals based on data, which align with whole school priorities. Students set their own goals, but teachers do not consistently give detailed feedback on work so students can establish precise next steps.

Faculty work hard, and collaborate well to share best practices. They are mindful of the individual student's circumstances when interpreting information and look at the student's progress holistically. Teachers reference data in their planning, and increasingly exploit interdisciplinary connections to reinforce understanding. However, not all lessons offer challenge to students at the right level, with questioning that stimulates critical thinking and tasks that extend learning. Teachers have varied opportunities to strengthen their practice through professional development based on school priorities and students' needs. In addition to the administration's recommendations, teachers set their own goals for growth, but not all incorporate measurable indicators and interim checkpoints to monitor their progress in meeting their goals. The school has an established structure for regular review, evaluation and adjustment to goals, organization and instruction. The administration manages the restricted budget to maximize students' learning in a broad range of subjects, creating innovative ways to harness staff strengths and capture students' interests. This serves to build community further by sharing experiential learning opportunities.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Leaders and faculty gather a wide range of data, which they interrogate carefully to understand and track students' performance and progress, sharing information regularly with students and parents.
- Students benefit from a range of increasingly imaginative and interdisciplinary opportunities, within a broad curriculum, that promote varied ways of achieving success delivered by enthusiastic and hard working teachers.
- The administration has a realistic picture of the staff's and the school's strengths and areas for growth, providing well-targeted professional development and offering leadership opportunities to build capacity.
- Students feel safe and encouraged to take risks as learners because of the strong interpersonal relationships within the school and feel valued when they see their success celebrated in quality display in hallways and many classrooms.
- The school pays careful attention to the needs of its particular subgroups, including special education students and English language learners, which enables them to integrate swiftly into the community.
- The strong principal guides the faculty in their collaborative endeavor and shared determination to improve further through transparent evaluation and aligned goal setting to achieve their vision.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance data management systems so that all information on students' achievements and needs is readily accessible to all members of faculty on a single database to support targeted instruction across the curriculum, foster engagement and improve student outcomes further.
- Sharpen the goal setting process for students by incorporating clear measurement indicators based on rubrics designed with teachers, providing detailed written feedback on student work, and engaging parents in supporting the achievement of these goals.
- Ensure that all lessons consistently challenge students at the right level through effective questioning and varied content, process or product based on accurate assessment.
- Refine teachers' professional goals so that they clearly detail measurable interim goals and checkpoints for monitoring progress.

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.

Generating and gathering a wide range of student performance data, the administration and faculty develop a clear picture of student achievement and progress across the school. Working with baselines and six interim marking periods as checkpoints means the school has an ongoing picture of strengths and areas for improvement across grades and subjects. Faculty assess students regularly in all subjects using formative tools such as unit tests and projects, in line with each subject's grading policies. The battery of information routinely includes standardized test outcomes, with specialized data for alternate assessment special education students and NYSESLAT proficiency levels for English language learners. The school has two main ethnic subgroups in its student population, and the principal in particular has a deep understanding of the differing backgrounds and cultures within these subgroups. She ensures that staff, in turn, use data with sensitivity and knowledge of individual student and family circumstances. . The administration and faculty evaluate all available data, including information from Acuity and ARIS, to gauge progress. In this way, leaders and teachers follow an ongoing systematic pattern of examining data to identify trends and inform instructional and organizational change. The administration, together with guidance counselors and staff, maintains a watchful eye on student attendance each week. Their intensive efforts show some positive impact on overall rates, although middle school students' attendance remains higher than that of high school students.

Parents receive regular information about students' performance and attendance every marking period. Although general parental involvement is not strong, the school sets up individual meetings with parents, students and staff to devise personalized action plans as required, which show positive results overall. Teachers share data, such as predictive assessment results, with students so that they have increased ownership of their learning. Within each content area, teacher facilitators organize cumulative and synthesized information from the department's staff in binders. Guidance and academic intervention providers also maintain accurate ongoing records. The administration is exploring ways to gather all available information into a single database to support efficient analysis, and so that teachers can readily access a comprehensive overview of individual student performance across all areas.

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.

Faculty collaborate frequently in formal and informal meetings to set learning goals by grade and subject. The school community utilizes its six marking periods and

associated report cards as a framework to formally analyze data and so align instruction. Weekly subject meetings rightly focus on formative assessments and student work, which enable ongoing adjustment to plans. Within this framework, teachers set subject and grade goals monthly toward meeting the annual goals for subjects. Departments are strengthening their goal setting for specific student groups, within the inclusive setting, supported by specialist teachers' input. Special education students and English language learners benefit from targeted interventions, or careful instruction in the self-contained setting, driven by individual education plans. Older special education students have successfully transitioned into culinary arts and dental hygienist programs. Newcomers, with whatever needs, swiftly integrate into the community.

Students in turn set their own subject goals, assisted by teachers, but these lack sufficient specificity to enable accurate monitoring of progress. Teachers do not consistently give detailed written feedback on why students have been successful, with clear next steps. Not all teachers generate rubrics with students to give them ownership and make them accountable as learners. Leaders and faculty evaluate the school with honesty and transparency, which ensures that all goals cross the school align with the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Teachers were fully involved in formulating whole school goals as extension to the work of one of the committees. The school leadership team includes students, with some parents now actively involved. Leaders and faculty work hard to establish high expectations and maintain a continual flow of information to parents about students' achievement and progress, with regular report cards, and frequent calls and emails. Student behavior is satisfactory, because they understand routines, rules and consequences. Parents are not yet involved in helping students' realize their personal learning goals. Many parents attend parent-teacher conferences, but active involvement in daily learning is not strong. However, the parent association and parent involvement committee show promise, setting themselves realistic goals to increase participation.

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 delivers a broad standards-based curriculum within the confines of its budget. Students experience art, music and physical education during their career at the school. They have elective programs in the arts, technology and personal finance. The newspaper and advanced placement classes in literature and composition provide suitably for students in line with the school's specialism. Students in grades 7 through 12 benefit from the "Advancement Via Independent Determination" (AVID) study and personal skills development program, which focuses on college preparation. Teachers work collaboratively and use ongoing assessments to plan instruction, in middle and high school meetings. However, teachers are also increasingly exploring interdisciplinary and real-life connections through active learning techniques to maximize student engagement. This results from informal discussion and sharing of ideas, so ensuring cross-fertilization of ideas between teachers of different content areas. A lesson reinforcing students' math understanding of area through kinesthetic activities successfully generated engagement, cooperative learning and students' ability to articulate findings. The "Olympics at Journalism" opportunities harness teachers' strengths and students' interests, offering alternative ways of experiencing success and building community. Because relationships are strong, students are comfortable to take risks as learners, following teachers' modeling this approach to learning. Although teachers show great enthusiasm and strong content knowledge, in most lessons they

miss opportunities to challenge students at their different levels of achievement and to extend their learning through effective questioning and varied instructional techniques to meet individual needs.

Among the community, personal relationships evidence care, respect for the individual and common purpose. Students see their successful efforts celebrated in hallways and many classrooms, which makes them feel valued as individuals. These displays reinforce expectations for effort. One student reflected that guidance plays an integral part in raising aspirations, saying that the college counsellor, "Pushes people to go past their comfort zone." Teachers and staff support each other collegially, so they grow as reflective practitioners. A teacher summarized this in stating, "I'm amazed how helpful other teachers are."

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.

The administration identifies its staff's strengths and areas for development through formal and informal observations, walkthroughs and discussion. The principal strategically builds capacity at all levels, for example by enabling an assistant principal to conduct many lesson observations in order to enhance her administration skills. Teachers engage in professional dialogue with each other, centered on student work, and freely ask for help to hone their skills. As one teacher said, "The learning never stops." The principal and assistant principals suitably support teachers new to the school or profession through mentoring and visitation opportunities. Teachers participate in the expanded inquiry team, professional development and other committees and lead programs. These opportunities develop faculty's instructional skills and build their own leadership skills. Although teachers devise their own professional growth plans through reflection and consultation with administrators, they are not encouraged consistently to define interim checkpoints with measurable outcomes to monitor progress toward fulfilling their goals. Professional development aligns with student and teacher needs. Accordingly, leaders and faculty studied "Data Wise" by Parker Boudett, which ensured a common framework and language in discussing differentiation. As a school that utilizes Teacher's College principles, it is beginning to use the associated data tool for analyzing student work, again to bring about consistency. Teachers benefit from external consultants' expertise to develop their practice, particularly in math and English language arts.

The school has valuable partnerships with Hunter College and others, so profits from external observation and student teacher input. Learning leaders usefully support students' learning in some content areas. The Brooklyn Center for Urban Development's link extends students' academic experience. In addition to the support of school counselors, students and families access the services of Project Reach Youth (PRY), located in the building, for counseling and tutoring support, which has proven beneficial over several years.

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.

The principal gives the community strong guidance in their shared determination to improve student outcomes. Based on realistic evaluation and transparent sharing of information, the administration ensures the school evolves to meet students' needs. Special education students and English language learners are supportively enabled to contribute to the inclusive community. Through weekly overview of data, collated in subject binders, content area teachers review assessment, refine instruction and review goals. Teachers collaborate in grade teams outside scheduled time, which demonstrates their commitment to improving outcomes for students. With an awareness of higher achieving students, teachers access and share information across grades to better meet the needs of individuals, with the math faculty leading in the development of a vertical curriculum.

Through analysis of all available data, the administration evaluates the impact of organizational decisions and programs. In this way, the principal changed classroom alignment to facilitate increased communication and informal development among content area teachers, which is showing positive results. Students benefit from adjustment to the structure of math classes through the year to meet their needs and so enable them to pass Regents. Because of small student numbers in grade 6, students profit from informal collaborative team teaching in math and English language arts. This enables greater individual attention that visibly results in increased confidence and cooperation. In attempting to fulfill its mission as a school for journalism, the community recognizes the need to adapt in line with this changing communication medium. Accordingly, the community is committed to the vision to utilize partnerships with news agencies and expand electives in order to prepare students for college and careers. Because of the passion, determination and developing skills of administrators and faculty, the school has the potential to realize this aim.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Secondary School for Journalism	△	➤	✓	+
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, DYQ, 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