

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

The School for International Studies

Middle School/High School 497

**284 Baltic Street
Brooklyn
NY 11201**

Principal: Fred Walsh

Dates of review: November 19-20, 2008.

Lead Reviewer: Andy McClean

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The School for International Studies is a middle/high school with 474 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 42% Black, 36% Hispanic, 18% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 87.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 63% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal exhibits positive leadership to ensure the inclusion of all students. Well-established systems of communication result in teachers', students' and families' comprehension of the school's challenging vision. Faculty members use a wide variety of data sources to evaluate instruction and modify school goals on a regular basis. At present though, there is insufficient use of this data to expand planning and delivery of greater differentiation to meet the needs of all students. The whole faculty demonstrates a quality of reflection on their instructional practice that produces a vibrant learning climate for their students.

Special education students and English language learners receive particularly focused support, and this enables them to play a large part in the school's life. Systems to identify these students' needs are in the process of being upgraded to ensure early intervention with programs to suit individual needs. The school, in keeping with its vision to promote student self-reliance and cultural awareness, makes great efforts to ensure students receive counseling to encourage independence. Indeed, all students confirm the "family" atmosphere of school, where their academic and social progress receives daily support from a wide variety of adults. As an International School, celebration of students' diverse cultural backgrounds is a major strand of school life and enables families to feel welcomed and supported.

A key facet of school life, with determined and very visible leadership from the principal, is to remove any complacency in learning. Teachers receive professional development that is linked to school goals. Teachers and students gain from many opportunities to innovate. Art projects enable colleagues to view different successful teaching styles. A student newspaper published and edited by students, records school events, successes and their opinions on current events in school.

Administration, grade and subject leaders measure the impact of professional development through regular class observations. The school is now at a stage to draw together the most successful elements of instruction and ensure their inclusion in all classes. Use of "hands on" materials is evident in some core subjects, which results in very effective student motivation and determination to progress. As yet, regular opportunities to embed students' abilities to deduce and infer from concrete, real life experiences are not present in all subjects.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal exhibits a determination to translate a vision of inclusion and success for all through the use of well-established systems of communication.
- Faculty members use a wide variety of data sources to evaluate instruction and modify school goals on a regular basis.
- Teachers and support staff demonstrate good reflection on past and current practice, well supported by focused professional development.
- Relationships between faculty and students show a rapport that encourages students to become self-reliant, culturally aware adults.
- The school promotes a very positive learning environment where students' diverse cultural backgrounds are celebrated.
- Strategies used by administration, deliver a school culture where faculty members are given many opportunities to take responsibility and lead innovative practice.

What the school needs to improve

- Use data more effectively in all classes to plan and deliver greater differentiation that meets the needs of all students.
- Expand opportunities in all subjects for students to improve their investigational skills, through use of hands-on resources.
- Drawing on the best instructional practice currently seen in school, ensure that teaching methods to promote greater student progress are present in all classes.
- Further develop systems of early identification of special education students and English language learners to provide structured support to meet their needs.

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.

Good systems are in place to enable administration and faculty to analyze a wide range of data at regular intervals throughout the year in English language arts, math and some other core subjects. Attendance levels receive regular scrutiny to ensure non-attendees and late-comers complete their courses. Administration uses contemporary data to inform students and families when non-attendance or persistent lateness to class threatens their progress. Data is well used to intervene at regular periods, every three weeks in the case of some core subjects, and address the progress of groups and individual students. At present, a majority of teachers use the wide range of data available to them to provide differentiated tasks for their students. Inconsistency remains in the use of this data to challenge all students in all classes.

Students and their families receive regular feedback on their current progress towards individual goals. Students attest to almost daily feedback across a wide range of subjects from well-informed teachers. Such is the rapport and honesty between students, their teachers and families, that an open dialogue on progress leads to very effective use of data to point most students to their next goal, as well as showing them how to achieve it.

The school uses data to identify the needs of special education students and English language learners effectively. However, due to an increase in numbers of these particular subgroups, systems to provide earlier identification and intervention need improvement. This is particularly evident from the school's valuable identification of the challenges presented to Middle Eastern boys throughout school.

Parents enjoy the regular contact through letters, electronic messages and personal contact with teachers, which provide them with a constant check on their children's progress.

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 principal shows great determination to include all students and provide them with a school experience that ensures successful progress to the next stage of their lives. Very effective support is evident from assistant principals and the leadership team. The wide range of data present in school is well used to identify areas for intervention. The faculty identifies a common goal, well-evidenced by the work of inquiry teams, to ensure clear comprehension of content vocabulary in all classes. Two inquiry teams now work to continue this area of challenge. Lessons learned from the team's functions last year are

now employed in the second inquiry team's examination of strategies to improve high school graduation levels.

Key areas of concern, identified through a wide range of data, lead to Comprehensive Education Plan goals. Since last review, procedures to make interim evaluations of these goals show greater rigor. Appropriate and challenging goals exist for the whole school and show differentiation for middle school and high school students. Administration is well aware of the need to employ successful strategies evident in middle school to achieve greater success in high school. There are not yet consistent opportunities to scrutinize and make use of data by a mixed team of middle and high school colleagues to advance continuity of student challenge. A range of core subjects uses data sources to set goals for groups and individual students. Parents are able to use technology to track their children's progress and contact the school if concerns appear.

Monthly conferences in a range of core subjects, more frequently in math and English language arts, result in students' awareness of the principal's determination that no complacency is acceptable. This is evident in all areas of school life such as behavior, attendance and academic progress.

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 provides a broad and balanced a curriculum. Innovative approaches to use of budget enable students to access a strong daily experience of English language arts, math, science and the arts. The school is justifiably proud of its achievements in music and art, with students also having a varied physical education program and college access courses. The recent addition of a new auditorium and improved library resources meet with wholehearted approval from teachers, parents and students alike.

Some teachers plan in detail for differentiation and use a variety of skilled tasks and questions to determine whether challenge to all levels of achievement is appropriate. This is inconsistent across the school, with the most effective differentiation in math and English language arts. Effective and regular scrutiny of the budget by school leaders, as well as the use of external funding streams, ensures the staff has the resources to deliver as wide a curriculum as possible, although an innovative culinary arts project has been deferred to concentrate funding on other core subjects.

An excellent example of funding decisions to engage students and add to the smooth running of the school is the Ambassadors program. Use of external funding to recruit a committed and diverse group of students and train them in conflict resolution sends a strong message to students and families, linked to a major school goal to ensure the existence of a positive learning environment. Students and parents indicate very high levels of trust in their teachers, together with a great desire to use their time in school for both academic and social advancement. The school culture is one of calm concentration on student progress and enjoyment.

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.

School leaders use a structured program of classroom observations to meet whole-school and individual teacher's professional development goals. Daily informal walkthroughs and conversations contribute to administration's clear understanding of current teacher concerns. The principal's model of visibility and availability to all, where possible, results in a very collegial culture. Teachers show regular weekly interest in inquiry team progress and through electronic messaging, formal meetings and informal discussions, good instructional practice extends to some classes. The principal is aware of the need to ensure the most successful elements of teaching evident in school become consistent in all classes.

Whole-faculty, grade and content-area meetings occur on a weekly basis. They show structure and focus linked to whole school, department and grade goals. Support from math and literacy coaches is very productive, with modeled classes from them both that produce a constant dialogue on instructional practice. This extends to classes beyond English language arts and math. Such is the open nature of pedagogical debate in school that many aspects of good practice begin to pervade all instruction. School administrators receive clear direction from the principal on their roles and their accountability for specific school goals. Faculty members engage in regular sharing of examination of data, student work and resources to ensure continuity of instruction between middle and high schools. Guidance counselors and other support staff show particular success in their strategies to improve attendance, behavior and parental participation in school activities.

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.

School leaders use a wide variety of data and information sources to evaluate progress of whole-school initiatives, subgroup and individual student levels. Modifications to plans and strategies result from regular discussion with teachers, families and the students themselves. A current example of this is recent review of data showing a group of students who arrive late to class, the cumulative effect being their risk of failure. Measures to address this challenge have shown good progress.

The principal's desire to make regular checks on the "pulse" of the school is evident in many aspects of school life. Conferences with students by all teachers on a very regular basis, collaborative reading groups, sports teams, dance events, trips out of school, contribute evidence that the faculty uses effectively to judge progress. Most importantly, scrutiny of students' individual progress both during and at the end of marking periods, across a range of core subjects, leads to regular adjustments of their goals. The principal has a very clear grasp of the school's successes and shortcomings. Comprehensive support from administrators, coaches, faculty and parents is evident. All participants understand their roles to achieve the nurturing yet academically rigorous community it strives to develop. Key to this, are the school's exemplary lines of communication.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: School for International Studies	△	➤	✓	+
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 subgroups 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 subgroups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and subgroups 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.

“**Subgroups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB subgroups, 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.

To what extent do ...	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.

To what extent do school leaders...	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.

To what extent do...	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