

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Legacy School for Integrated Studies

High School 429

**34 West 14 Street
New York
NY 10011**

Principal: Gregory Rodrigues

Dates of review: May 7 – 8, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Legacy School for Integrated Studies is a high school with 378 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 45% Black, 49% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 50% and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 77%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Through his skilful and careful stewardship, the principal has successfully and rapidly transformed this small high school from one causing concern into one now judged to be of “good standing”. All members of the school community have played their part by demonstrating their commitment to improving every student’s social and academic performance. There is increasingly good teamwork between all members of staff underpinned by the new collaborative structures that the administration has introduced. The school is now operating proficiently across most aspects of its work. Students feel a sense of belonging to the school within the small “family groups” where they are able to freely discuss their goals, work and any problems that they may be encountering. The administration has brought about an enduring culture of self-reflection and self-assessment both for staff and students. This culture is underpinned by the effective collection of performance data in English language arts, math, science and social studies. The school has yet to extend data collection to all subgroups and to all core subject areas. The school has not yet developed a tracking system common to all staff so that results can be shared easily across teachers, classes and grades. Goal setting is used widely and appropriately as a means to motivate students and to measure success accurately. Interim benchmarks are in place for many of the school’s plans, but they are sometimes not sufficiently specific. This means that the school may not know until too late that a final goal is unlikely to be reached.

Staff receive welcome, accurate information from administrators about their own performance, judged on the basis of regular observations and walkthroughs. The administration provides a good range of professional development activities based on observations, school-wide initiatives and self-assessment. As a result, most teachers are working optimally to provide lessons that are well matched to the range of needs and performance levels in their classes. A few teachers are not yet sufficiently skilful in providing this match, and this hampers students’ progress in lessons. There is a strong bond between the school and home, and parents are fully involved in supporting the students’ learning because of the effective transfer of information.

Staff, parents and students speak highly of the principal. “The best principal alive, he’s really connected”, said one student. “The father, the almighty carer”, was how a teacher described him. The principal correctly recognizes though that he has not yet brought all the staff along with him in his desire for rapid improvement. The parents’ advice to him was clear, “Do more of what you’re doing whatever it is - it’s working.”

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- All members of the school community are working together increasingly well under the careful leadership of the principal in order to bring about rapid improvements in programs, instruction and student performance.
- The school ensures that there is a strong partnership with parents, coupled with good arrangement for students' self-assessment, to support the students' learning.
- The school collects detailed information on the performance of students in English language arts, math science and social studies that teachers generally use well in planning instruction.
- Teachers appreciate the frequent, accurate feedback that the administrators offer them on their performance and the good range of opportunities they provide for professional development.
- Students and their families greatly value the good support, for example through the family groups, that the school organizes to promote the students' physical, emotional and intellectual well-being.
- The school community is committed to the school's mission to provide a self-critical learning community that cherishes and nurtures all students so that they achieve their full potential.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the good practice in collection, utilization and review of student information across all core subject areas, and introduce a common procedure to track students' progress.
- Ensure that all teachers provide instruction that always closely matches the requirements of every student in the class.
- Make more effective use of subgroup information to plan for effective learning in all core subject areas.
- Ensure that all school plans have specific interim benchmarks so that the school can measure at an early stage whether it is likely to achieve its goals.

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.

Teachers diligently collect and analyze student performance information in attendance, behavior, English language arts, math, science and social studies. The school does not yet collect performance information other subject areas. Most, though not yet all, teachers utilize the information well, where it exists, in planning instruction. All teachers have received training on how to use the new ARIS system, and many are excited by the increased opportunities to refine the focus of their teaching. Other developing school-wide processes make proficient use of the available student information. For example, the school has introduced an effective organizational rationale called the "AMES" (Approaching, Meeting, or Exceeding Standards) system whereby grade teams group students into classes based on projected performance in Regents examinations, principally in English language arts and math. This system works well in that teachers are able to focus their teaching on a narrower performance range than would otherwise be possible. Many teachers have developed their own very useful systems to track students' progress. The school has correctly recognized that it now needs to ensure consistency by having a system that is common across all grades, classes and staff.

The school has begun to collect, analyze and utilize information in English language arts and math about the various subgroups in the school, such as ethnic and gender groups. This process does not yet extend to the other core subject areas. Not all teachers recognize the value of using this information in uncovering underachievement and developing appropriate remedial strategies. However, the school is able to demonstrate clearly how such analysis and subsequent targeted action result in raised performance. For example, the literacy coach has diversified the range of reading books, such as introducing graphic novels, which is already resulting in higher reading levels for low-performing boys. The school reaches out to parents in multiple ways such as emailing and frequent telephone calls. Parents speak highly of the way in which all teachers make themselves available at all times including evenings and weekends, and say that teachers go out of their way to keep them informed about their children's performance and 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.

Students have well-written, relevant and specific individual learning goals in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Staff and students review these goals

every two weeks, and re-set them if necessary. The school does not yet set individual goals in all other core subject areas.

The school allocates every student to a “family group” in which each member of staff takes responsibility for the personal and academic performance of a small group of students. The groups hold a weekly, sometimes daily, advisory meeting in which students discuss and review their individual goals, their next steps and how to overcome any academic or personal difficulties they may be experiencing. Through these groups, students have the opportunities for guided self-assessment and to be central in the process of setting and reviewing their own goals. Staff, students and parents regard these meetings as one of the cornerstones in raising their performance. As a consequence of these meetings, as well as good information being sent home, students and their parents have a good understanding of their goals and next steps. The achievement of goals is a high priority both at school and at home and parents and students have high expectations of success. The majority aspire to go to university and enter professions such as doctors, lawyers and teachers.

Staff meet together regularly in grade-level and departmental meetings to discuss and review student information as well as grade, department and school-wide goals. All members of the school community, including service providers and parents’ representatives, are included in developing the schools’ Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP). Final goals in the plan are smart, and all relate to students’ performance. Success criteria are based on the effective use of trend information. Although there is good detail on the strategies to be used in achieving the goals, interim goals and benchmarks within the plan are not yet sufficiently precise in terms of student outcomes against which the school can measure earlier whether it is on track to reach the goals.

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 offers an increasingly wide range of opportunities for students to achieve academic success. Since the last quality review, it has widened the number of higher level courses, and students are now required to take Regents examinations in four main content areas. The school now offers Advanced Placement classes in English, US history and math. However, Legacy does not yet provide all students with the opportunity to achieve examination success in all core subject areas, including physical education and the arts. Nevertheless, the school does offer well-attended and exciting after-school clubs in fashion, dance, drama and video. The school does not have its own gym and is attempting to gain an agreement with the neighboring sports club to use its facilities. The school has invested considerable resources into providing more technology, such as Smartboards and a computer lab, in order to increase engagement among students. It has also acted wisely to improve the teaching of science by purchasing a mobile lab in order to provide more exciting opportunities for hands-on investigation and experimentation.

The school arranges teaching groups in English language arts and math through the AMES system in order to reduce the range of different needs in each class. This system

is supplemented by the use of collaborative team teaching for lower performing students, and reading groups are organized around reading levels. The school intends to expand the collaborative team teaching model to include social studies and science. The school has enterprisingly carried out, through the family groups, a school-wide survey to identify students' different learning styles. This is in order that teachers can develop, adjust and use strategies, such as room redesign and small-group techniques, that will be beneficial to every learning style in the class. Most teachers utilize all this information well in order to ensure that all students in the class are appropriately challenged by the instructional content, and that the work is at the correct level to cover the needs of every student. However, even with the AMES arrangements, a few teachers have been slow to take on board the necessary skills and understanding. As a consequence, in a few classes, students underperform because the work is too easy for some, while others struggle to keep up. The administration has recognized this and is working hard to bring these teachers up to the level of the best, for example by providing staff with specialist training in differentiation from external consultants. .

Students all say that they respect all the staff and have adults they would trust with their personal or academic problems. They particularly like lessons in which teachers give them room to develop as independent learners. As one group said, "With some teachers, we make our own lessons, so that we learn from each other." Classrooms are calm and industrious places of learning. There is little fighting or bullying and no reported gang activity. "A friendly environment where everyone knows everyone", as one student put it. The school correctly recognizes that one or two teachers have difficulties in always maintaining control in the classroom, and is working hard with the teachers to bring about improvement. Responses in the learning environment survey indicated above average levels of trust and respect.

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.

Teachers report that they find the administrators helpful and largely positive when they carry out walkthroughs and lesson observations. Teachers receive written notes following these events that clearly identify up to three areas for improvement. At the end of each year, teachers self-assess their performance and make suggestions to the administrators on the range of professional development they require to meet the school's and their own aspirations and expectations. This is a relatively new process for the staff, and most of the faculty welcomes the improved communication between themselves and the administrators. The next step for the school is to provide each member of staff with a yearly individual professional development plan in order to make clear their areas for priority attention and the professional development opportunities they will undertake. Teachers agree that the school provides an ever-widening range of professional development activities that accurately meets their needs.

The principal is anxious to seek out the staff's views and to distribute decision-making and leadership further. He encourages intervisitations wherever possible so that less experienced staff can see veteran staff modeling good practice. He has made a good start in promoting professional collaborations by giving time for common planning meetings, setting up a teacher center and developing staff teams for professional

development, grading and inquiry. Grade and departmental meetings take place for English language arts, math, science and social studies though not yet for all core subjects. The three inquiry teams are demonstrating the effectiveness of small-scale action research through some powerful work in raising the performance of students who are causing concern. The work of the teams is inspiring other staff around the school to undertake their own research in order to overcome deep-seated and long-standing difficulties, particularly of boys who are, in the principal's words, "over-age and under-credited".

Aside from the very effective family groups, the school provides good personal and academic assistance to students through a range of effective internal and external support services. The school makes good use of community-based organizations to assist in monitoring students' performance so that staff are aware at an early stage if student require support. Students benefit from the school's involvement with the ENACT organization that enables students to learn social emotional skills through creative drama and drama therapy techniques. A range of procedures, some innovative, are in place to improve attendance. One student said, "They even make random calls to you early in the morning to wake you up."

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 school's processes, and especially the family group arrangements, mean that there is a culture of continual monitoring of students' progress in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Most teachers have good arrangements for continual classroom assessment and for tracking individual progress. The school pays good attention to the outcomes of external monitoring such as the learning environment survey and the quality review, and for acting promptly upon their findings. All within the school community agree that the school has come on leaps and bounds under the leadership of the present principal. The goal set by the principal on his arrival to improve the school so that it was in good standing is a great achievement for all concerned in the journey so far.

The cornerstone of this success has been to give teachers the skills to identify the progress that students are making and to ensure that they receive the individualized attention they need to stay on course. The principal, his cabinet and the faculty recognize this as a first step, and recognize correctly that the accountability and communication systems are proficient but not yet fully effective. The systems do not yet extend across all the core subject areas and some systems, such as progress tracking, are not consistent across all classes. Some goal setting and benchmarking is not yet sufficiently precise. There is no doubt that all the school community is fully committed to the common mission of maximizing the social and academic life-chances of all the students. All staff are equally committed to self-reflection and to continuing improvement. Through his careful and very visible approach, the principal has gained the confidence of many of the staff, but there are still some staff who have not yet been persuaded that there is a need for quite such rapid change. The principal has not yet clarified sufficiently clearly his strategies for how he intends to achieve even greater consensus during the next period and to distribute leadership even more widely.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Legacy School for Integrated 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 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, DY0, 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