

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Life Sciences Secondary School

Middle-High School 655

**320 East 96 Street
New York
NY 10128**

Principal: Genevieve Stanislaus

Dates of review: October 21-22, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Life Sciences Secondary School is a middle/high school with 691 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 30% Black, 65% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% American Indian and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 87.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 63% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Life Sciences School is well focused on its overarching mission to prepare students for college entrance and career readiness. Science is a special emphasis that is enhanced through medical internships at Mt. Sinai Hospital. Many improvements have been made to the school's management structure under the current administration and these have improved the delivery of the curriculum across all core subjects. The school is well resourced for learning, including instructional technology, and this benefits teachers and students alike.

Recent enhancements to data analysis capacity have provided leaders with the ability to analyze the information on student progress efficiently, including that for subgroups. This is especially effective at the high school level but is not as far developed in the middle school. Overall, school plans broadly reflect the high expectations for students' future success. Most, however, lack clear interim measures with which to assess rates of progress and to adjust plans and actions if necessary. Goal setting to include monitoring student progress in individual courses is not common either but student's overall understanding of what is necessary to meet graduation targets is good. While plans lack interim measures of success, most practices and structures do provide support for the monitoring of overall progress.

The curriculum is very well aligned to State standards and to the school's mission. Capable students are afforded challenging courses but not all instruction within individual classes is sufficiently differentiated to meet all the needs across the whole range of learners. Teachers are supported well in their professional development through a network of expert advisors. They benefit from individualized and small group support for planning lessons and are increasing their instructional repertoires and learning how to use data to inform their teaching. Administrative and other teams use a broad range of data to judge the effectiveness of teaching, organizational decisions and interventions. Adjustments are made to support teaching and learning within the context of Life Sciences clear aims and to support its students' future success.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has enhanced the use of data analysis software particularly in the high school and interactive on-line resources enhance the organization of student data and expand communication regarding student progress.
- Student achievement data is effectively disaggregated across a range of subjects to inform the analysis of progress by subgroup and gender.
- Administrators make suitable organizational decisions that support optimal opportunities for student learning.
- Professional development is well targeted at building skills among all teachers, especially a large proportion that are in the early stages of their careers.
- The delivery of the curriculum is well supported by a wide variety of instructional resources.
- Curriculum and instruction are well aligned the State and City standards and to the school's overarching mission to support students' readiness for post secondary education and career readiness.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all constituents are involved in creating school plans and that all plans are sufficiently detailed to include measurable interim targets to monitor attainment of stated outcomes.
- Engage students in individual goal setting across all core subjects based on their understanding of their learning needs.
- Extend good data gathering and analysis practices in place at the high school to include all grades and subjects at the middle school.
- Continue to enhance teachers' skills in using data to plan for differentiated instruction based on student need and in reflecting on the success of their approaches to revise classroom practice.

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 school gathers a wide range of student achievement data, including that from State and City assessments, attendance records and reports of behavioral incidents. This is supplemented by teachers' assessments of learning through formative and summative quizzes, tests, mid-term and final exams. Together, these data sources give school leaders and faculty a good understanding of student progress, especially in the high school where data analysis software enhances the analysis of progress across all core subjects. Thus, students' grades, Regents pass rates, and progress towards meeting graduation requirements is tracked efficiently and trends can be identified and shared with staff, students and parents. Middle school student's progress is tracked based, largely, on the analysis of assessments in English language arts, math and science, which are broken down by performance on content strands, but does not extend to other subjects as analysis does of students' high school performance. Effective analysis of performance by ethnicity, gender, special education or English language learner status is undertaken by subject and compared year on year to assist leaders to identify trends in the performance of subgroups. Additionally, specialized assessments for English language learners are used effectively for program placement and to inform their instruction in the general education setting resulting in good progress.

Progress reports, report cards and informal communications among the school, students and families are sufficient to keep all informed as to progress in learning. As well, the school has employed an interactive software program that enables students and their families to communicate electronically with teachers which assists teachers in providing regular updates on performance, lessons and assignments.

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's high expectations for student achievement are embodied in its mission and evidenced in the overall thrust for college and career readiness. Requirements for credit accrual exceeds City standards in math and science and students are urged at every step to aim high, take challenging courses and adhere to attendance and other school policies. Parents are well informed as to expectations and the goals the school has for students, especially where they relate to credits earned and preparedness for graduation. Formal and informal conferencing with teachers and guidance personnel

assists students in keeping focused on their overall goals. In a few subjects, students set their own personal learning goals but this is not a widespread practice across the school, so most do not have clear pathways with defined next steps with which to focus their studies. Teachers, through analysis of student's progress in class, do have clear understandings of where students need to concentrate their learning.

Learning goals for subjects are expressed through curriculum guides and monthly subject meetings serve to monitor their attainment. Teachers and administrators use marking period reports to assess the progress of students as well as teachers' individual effectiveness. These reports inform necessary adjustments to students' assigned academic program. Goals for improvements across all aspects of the school are set forth in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The school uses appropriate analysis of data to set targets in its action plan that guides throughout the year, progress towards improvements. Parents, administrators and, to a lesser degree, teachers and students, are involved in its development through membership on the School Leadership Team.

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 curriculum is tightly aligned with State and City standards and is reflective of the institutional emphasis on acceleration and high academic achievement. Students are grouped by ability in most subjects, providing various levels of challenge or support by placement. Within classes differentiation based on the analysis of students' strengths and learning needs is not widespread and some of the most capable are not always sufficiently challenged as instruction is usually pitched to the whole class. Administrators have challenged teachers to focus on the differentiation of learning activities to support engagement and many teachers are working to plan lessons that reflect this aspect.

Very ample resources are available for teaching and learning, including instructional technology which, when used effectively, adds interest and enables advancements in students' learning. Students are focused and relationships among them and their teachers and administrators are respectful as is the case between the school and parents.

Despite its small size and the lack of specialized instructional settings, such as a gymnasium or dance studio, the principal has created effective alternative teaching stations, which serve students well. Importantly, up-to-date science labs have been created to support student learning and are reflective of the school's mission. Other organizational decisions, such as the creation of a Saturday Academy to enhance support for struggling students and the reassignment of staff to better meet the needs of, for example, incoming sixth grade students, have resulted in improved achievement in some subjects.

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 receive good support for developing their instructional skills from administrators and, especially, from the school's team of staff developers. Teachers have established personal development plans that, increasingly, are informing the assistance they are given, but this is a new initiative. The school's staff includes a relatively high proportion of teachers new to the profession and opportunities for one-on-one in-class coaching and assistance in planning is regular and effective in developing their instructional skills. Intervisitations between teachers are less common, but informal sharing among staff is a good source of support for teachers' skill developments and is improving instruction. Formal feedback from administrators on instruction is pointed and linked to expectations set forth for the staff as a whole, reinforcing expectations, which recently, include planning of lessons that provide for active engagement in learning. Teachers' schedules include regular times for subject area meetings and for meetings with staff developers. These provide opportunities to share practices, address student achievement data and monitor curricular progress, all of which are increasing capacity to improve student achievement. Teachers are also afforded opportunities to participate on the Inquiry Team and other committees structured to address the school's overall improvements. The team's intervention, the Saturday Academy, has proved beneficial and is being continued and expanded to meet the needs of a broader range of students.

Students benefit from a network of academic and social service supports that guide their intellectual and personal development. To enhance the induction of ninth grade students into the high school setting, the school is forming advisory classes. The school's longstanding partnership with Mt. Sinai Hospital enables instructive medical internships for the students at Life Sciences.

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 mission to prepare students for college and career success, with a special emphasis on the sciences, is clearly understood by all constituents and is the driving force behind all decisions and actions. Supporting plans are, for the most part, sufficiently detailed and set clear targets for improvements and progress at the whole school, grade and subject level. However, the majority lack interim measures of progress by which to better gauge incremental success and proactively make informed adjustments to accelerate learning; this includes the Comprehensive Education Plan. Nonetheless, structures such as the cabinet, content team meetings and the Inquiry team provide for regularly scheduled progress monitoring as revealed by student assessments and other measures of progress. Staff developer's records are effectively used to inform teacher support decisions. Scholarship reports inform shifts in instructional programs resulting in more effective teaching for students. The delivery of the curriculum is monitored and adjusted through regular departmental discussions to

best meet students' needs. Individualized plans and mandated testing effectively inform progress monitoring for English language learners and special education students.

School leaders meet frequently to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions, professional development initiatives and support for teachers. Sources such as the Quality Review reports, the school report card and other pertinent data such as that from the Inquiry Team are used to adjust or continue initiatives. Data software was incorporated as a direct result of the previous Quality Review and is proving to be a valuable resource for quick identification of students' status and progress monitoring towards graduation.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Life Sciences Secondary School	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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.

To what extent do ...	△	➤	✓	+
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...	△	➤	✓	+
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 ...	△	➤	✓	+
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

△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed
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