

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The High School of Applied Communication

Q267

**30-20 Thomson Avenue
Queens
NY 11101**

Principal: Dan Korb

Dates of review: March 4 - 5, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Bonnie Laboy

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The High School of Applied Communication is a high school with 367 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 13% Black, 55% Hispanic, 19% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 90.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 68% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The High School of Applied Communications is a small high school that utilizes the America's Choice curriculum to support students' literacy development. Students work in cooperative group activities and are accustomed to engaging with one another to support each other's learning. The acting principal has led the school since September and has made an impact in a short period of time. As his first goal, the acting principal set out to provide students with a safe, caring environment. There is no doubt among students, parents and teachers that his leadership and focus in this area has brought about positive change. All constituencies identified marked improvements in the school's tone and climate. The students feel supported and behave appropriately because of the high standards expected of them. Teachers relate well to their students and to their parents and relationships are strong at the school. Parents are proud of the acting principal's desire to "improve his Spanish-speaking abilities" to better relate to them.

The school has organized collaborative teams of teachers who regularly meet to discuss students and plan lessons within and across curriculum areas. Many of the lessons are planned using America's Choice rituals and routines. Within this structure however, differentiated instruction based on student assessments and ability levels is not consistently evident. The principal acknowledges that there is much more to accomplish and this is demonstrated in the lack of consistency in the delivery of instruction between classrooms and curriculum subject areas. Similarly, there are opportunities to strengthen the action planning and monitoring systems across the school. The school does not yet fully analyze student performance by subgroups. A strong challenge for the school remains in conducting in-depth analysis of its student data, setting clear goals and establishing strategic plans with benchmarks to monitor student progress throughout the year. The school has begun to use student data to make scheduling and programming decisions, particularly in science.

Following the previous review, the school has established a mentoring system for new teachers. Although the school has not yet published a professional development plan, teachers are provided with many opportunities to learn. These range from visiting neighboring schools, to sharing their own practice at the school, to attending external professional development.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- In a short period of time, the principal has created a positive school climate where students and parents feel supported by the staff.
- The teachers collect a wide range of informal and formal data in their Teacher Assessment Notebooks.
- The principal's expectations for consistent and timely communication to parents are put into practice by all staff.
- Scheduling and programming decisions reflect the learning needs of students.
- Weekly scheduled planning time enables teachers to collaborate in planning within and across curriculum areas.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the analysis of student data so that patterns of performance of key subgroups can be more readily identified.
- Explore ways to use assessment data to differentiate classroom instruction and learning objectives more effectively.
- Refine the inquiry process in order to extend the work of professional learning committees and provide them with a structure in which to work.
- Refine strategic planning and goal setting so that expected improvements are clearly stated and that progress towards achievement is consistently monitored and evaluated with set benchmarks.
- Establish interim checkmarks that are monitored throughout the year in order to achieve maximum learning outcomes in all core subjects to meet students' individual and group 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.

The school uses data such as Regents scores, scholarship reports, middle school testing records and attendance figures to understand its students. The school analyzes the achievement data from the Department of Education, including the Progress Report and Learning Environment Survey along with the data housed in ARIS to track individual student performance. Administrators expect classroom teachers to keep their own assessment information on individual student progress. All teachers gather their own informal and formal assessment data to track students' performance in their Teacher Assessment Notebooks (TANs). This data is used fairly consistently to set individual goals for students at the end of each term. The school is not yet using assessment data at classroom and grade level consistently in order to plan for differentiated instruction.

Teachers track the performance of individual special education students and English language learners' data. Some information about subgroups is gathered; however the school does not yet analyze systemically information for all subgroups within the school, such as English language learner boys and girls. The school acknowledges variations in student performance by ethnic group although there is no detailed analysis of these differences across grades and subjects. Although the school is aware of some trends in achievement, it does not use data strategically to analyze possible causes for this, or to identify targeted intervention and support programs to resolve these specific issues. The school does not consider assessment data fully to identify the grade level differences between teachers and subjects. A combination of collaborative classes and intervention programs provide effective support to special education students.

A thorough analysis of student attendance data identified a need to increase staff working and communicating more directly with families. The administration took action and, as a result, school attendance has improved. Parents value the frequent information they receive from individual teachers and the school's social worker on their child's progress. This information is about achievement as well as any concerns about performance.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school's plans focus primarily on outcomes such as end of term grades and Regents pass rates. Teachers establish end-of-term goals for students in their TANs. Student goals and plans in subject area classes are broad and not sufficiently specific.

As a result, it is difficult to identify progress at suitable intervals or the effectiveness of interventions school wide. The principal is aware of goals set but does not articulate strategic plans to accomplish them. Currently there are no plans with timelines and benchmarks to ensure effective implementation and to secure accelerated progress for the school. It is not therefore possible to measure growth throughout the year. Common planning periods, which are programmed into teacher schedules, result in close collaboration among some teachers. The school has developed a 9th grade advisory program, which is supported by the guidance counselor, to set short- and long-term goals for 9th grade students. However, results of the program's effectiveness have yet to be analyzed.

The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) was developed collaboratively with input from staff and parents. The CEP's goals focus on passing rates, use of data and strengthening the school's learning community. Data for the CEP was derived from Regents exams, information from school walkthroughs and ARIS data. Teachers have set individual student goals, but these are not yet linked to whole-school goals. Some teachers make effective use of an electronic data system, to communicate with students and parents on student progress with respect to homework, exams and class work. The school welcomes parental involvement and is building a strong, personalized home-school connection. Parents are pleased with the school and state that students feel happy and valued. Parents value the regular communication from administration, guidance staff and teachers and appreciate the insistence on a school uniform, mutual respect and the way in which the staff support the students.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school has adopted the America's Choice curriculum to ensure consistency of approach and ensures that all teachers receive common training. As a consequence, students are well versed in the program's rituals and routines such as working in collaborative groups and maintaining a student "Sourcebook" to collect all pertinent subject area information and materials. Daily classroom instruction is predominantly delivered in the workshop model with no clear evidence of differentiated instruction. Some core subject teachers set unit goals for each unit. However, they do not deconstruct data consistently to determine whether unit goals have been met and what skills or topics need to be retaught to the class. While teachers keep individual student data records in their TANs, their assessments do not inform differentiated instruction, and in most lessons expectations and activities are the same for all students. Too often students do the same work with different amounts of in-class support. Consequently, some students find the work too hard while for others the work is unchallenging. Members of the staff are enthusiastic about teaching and are committed to their students' growth. They seek opportunities to collaborate both formally and informally across content areas. Leaders have scheduled common planning time for teachers which fosters strong collaborations, particularly between special education and general education teachers.

The school makes scheduling decisions that support collegiality and professional development. For example, the school has instituted weekly hour-long professional

development sessions this term. How this time will be used has yet to be determined and, consequently, no strategic plan is in place to measure its effectiveness.

Leaders make organizational decisions in efforts to help students meet graduation requirements. These include an attendance initiative, re-programming of students based on need and the creation of a new science elective, Ecology, to support struggling science students. Staff consistently feel supported by their leaders and colleagues. A positive climate for learning permeates the school. Students show respect for each other in lessons. For example, they work in cooperative groups, listen to one another's responses and support each other in checking for understanding. Students and parents expressed a desire for a greater variety of electives and advanced placement courses. The school does not currently employ an art teacher, therefore students are not able to participate in quality art classes.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school offers many opportunities for teachers to take part in a wide range of professional development activities to support their development. Professional development ranges from one-on-one mentor training for new teachers, America's Choice consultant services, in-school support, visits to neighboring schools and off-site workshops. In spite of this range, the impact is limited as there is no school wide professional development plan, nor do teachers have their own individual plans. Teachers indicate that both the principal and assistant principals conduct formal and informal observations. However, these observations do not result in leaders planning differentiated strategies for support to teachers over time. Very recently, Wednesday afternoon professional development sessions have begun. Leaders have yet to develop a professional development plan for these sessions, therefore, its effectiveness is unclear. Intervisitations provide teachers with useful opportunities not only to see practice within their own subject but also other disciplines and approaches. However, there is currently no systemic program to ensure that this takes place on a regular and consistent basis among all staff.

The school's inquiry team is currently studying 10th grade history students. The school is still in the stage of analyzing student data, therefore has not yet implemented a change strategy. Due to lack of progress made thus far this year in the inquiry process, the team speaks broadly about the possible outcomes of their work. Consequently, the opportunity to have any impact on school systems and processes this year is greatly reduced. The school utilizes outside agencies to support both students and parents. A strong collaboration with Little Angels foundation promotes the teaching of sign language. Parents and students are extremely enthusiastic about this collaboration. The principal actively seeks out new partnerships and is currently collaborating with *The Queens Chronicle* to celebrate and publish students' writing.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

At the end of every marking period, the school reviews its data about the performance of individual student's grades but it does not evaluate the performance and progress of all the subgroups within the school systemically. Nor does the school systemically evaluate results at classroom and grade levels. The school recognizes that further development is required. Administrators do not review data and interim assessments consistently and systematically. As a result, data is not used to analyze strengths, weaknesses and trends, or to set objectively measurable interim and long-term goals, other than success in exams.

There is very little evidence of school- wide or departmental action plans that detail subject goals and how they intend to implement improvements. The plans that are in place do not include time frames for making on-going adjustments to student supports, curriculum plans or instructional practice in response to on-going, interim student performance data. Consequently, strategic planning and goal setting with interim checkmarks that are monitored through the school year are not in place. As a result, there is no strategic overview or coherent vision for the school. The school self-evaluation form is very brief and not evaluative. It does not focus sufficiently on the impact of actions or strategic planning.

There is no coherent, clearly articulated vision for the school's development with an associated systematic and actionable plan. School leaders' actions have had an impact on organizational and safety decisions, but they have not yet taken the same level of action to analyze data regularly and thus have an impact upon instruction on a school-wide basis to accelerate student learning.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The High School of Applied Communication	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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