

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

International Community High School

High School 334

Brook Ave

Bronx

NY 10456

Principal: Berena Cabarcas

Dates of review: April 21 - 22, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Kathleen Tuttle

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

International Community High School is a high school with 262 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 26% Black, 66% Hispanic, 6% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 91% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 93.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 88% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The International Community High School is collectively establishing a true professional learning community where everyone can learn and work together for the school's success in meeting the needs of its English language learner population. Since more than a third of students have interrupted education backgrounds, teachers successfully created a portfolio to "showcase" their learning for the year. Teachers plan project based lessons where students are encouraged to work together in groups to facilitate their learning. The students have clear rubrics to evaluate their portfolio work, but as of yet specific, measurable long- and short-term goals are not part of that evaluation. The faculty credits the language development that is at the center of the portfolio work with increasing students' ability to acquire language. One student stated, "We help each other because we are at different levels of learning English. I might be able to help someone with math and then someone else will help me in a different area." Presently the school is working to ensure purposeful heterogeneous groups with different languages working together to foster the collaborative nature the school values.

The school is in its third year of development but lacks the systems and structures needed to use data to drive goal setting and instruction. Since returning from an eight month medical leave of absence in February, the principal has focused professional development on improving student engagement. Teachers are enthusiastic about the beginning of teacher observations using the professional teaching standards. Currently there is no professional development plan for teachers aligned with measurable school goals. Some teachers have goals but there is a lack of a formal structure to set and evaluate goals. In addition, whole school goal planning lacks specific interim and long-term goals with measurable outcomes against which to measure progress, make adjustments, and evaluate success.

The principal uses her vision of preparing students to do college ready work to establish strong relationships throughout the school community. Her belief in collaboration and the empowerment of her staff has led to both teachers and students embracing the collaborative learning model. Teachers work diligently developing curriculum packets for each unit of study that is both rigorous and differentiated. Presently, there is a notable inconsistency in the alignment with the state standards and performance indicators, which makes goal setting difficult. Neither students nor their parents are aware of the state standards that are required to graduate from high school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Relationships among students, teachers, parents, and school leaders are warm and respectful, resulting in an environment that is conducive to learning.
- The development of yearly portfolios has been instrumental in supporting students to acquire language skills.
- The school develops the curriculum with project-based learning in mind, giving students the opportunities to select a project based on their own learning styles and interests.
- The principal has established strong staff relationships with good opportunities for collaboration to improve instruction and discuss the progress of individual students.
- The school has established professional learning communities on all teams and they work collaboratively to plan curriculum and instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish more consistency in setting short-term student learning goals in all subject areas based on benchmark data and their projected improvement in achievement, which students and their families can fully understand.
- Ensure that all lessons and homework continue to consistently challenge students and extend learning at their individual levels using a variety of methods to enable them to demonstrate their understanding.
- Sharpen school improvement planning by identifying specific interim and long-term goals with measurable outcomes against which to measure progress, make adjustments, and evaluate success.
- Implement a yearly professional development plan for teachers aligned to measurable whole school and individual teacher goals.
- Explicitly state the alignment between the school's international curriculum and the state standards and performance indicators in all subject areas, including technology.

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 is making effective use of subgroup data to understand the diversity of the school population and their potential needs as they enter the school. Staff interview students and their parent when they register to enable the school to develop the proper placement for each student. In addition to regular tests required by the Department of Education, the school uses a test called World-Class Instructional Design and Assessments, which it believes gives a clearer picture of students' academic achievement. It maps out the rubrics that correlate with this test into specific skills in reading, writing, and listening.

The school makes a consistent, concerted effort to keep parents informed about their child's progress. Parents recognize the school's genuine concern for their children. The school holds parent conferences periodically throughout the year as needed or requested, and present student work at that time so parents are up to date with current progress. To improve the school goal of students being on time for school, teachers decided that in addition to the school attendance person calling home, they would also call home so parents and students would know how much the teachers valued the students' attendance in class. These calls have made a significant difference in students' arrival to school on time.

Teachers wanted more communication with parents on student progress so they changed the number of times parents get report cards from four to six times a year. Student portfolios play a major role in analyzing student performance throughout the year. Students give an oral presentation on their portfolio pieces at the end of each semester. The school creates weekly assignments to give students the support and instruction they need to be successful on their portfolio pieces. The portfolio process is an instrumental tool to help students acquire language acquisition skills, which in turn improve student achievement. This year the school was successful in taking the portfolio rubrics for each grade level and translating them into every language spoken at the school for the benefit of improving communication with the parents. However, as of yet the school does not have a structure for providing parents with multiple opportunities to communicate the learning needs of their children to allow for reciprocal ongoing discussions regarding student 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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The staff work collaboratively to develop the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The plan contains goals established to improve student engagement through improved attendance, course passing rates and portfolio passing rates. While looking at the scholarship report the school noticed many students with incomplete grades. It then created a credit recovery program with a personal intervention plan for each student with incomplete grades. Parents receive promotion in doubt letters in their own languages so they are aware of the subjects students are failing. This program is having a positive effect on credit accumulation and reducing the failing rates. However, goal setting is not currently part of the student's individual plan. Parents and students are unclear about the learning goals, and the next steps to achieve the goals within a designated time. Without a student goal structure in place, there are no periodic checkpoints throughout the year. Consequently, students do not know if they are on track to receive credit for the course.

Teachers meet collaboratively to discuss curriculum and student learning needs on a weekly basis. Teachers working in the same grade level and content area plan together to align the curriculum for consistency across a content area for their grade level. The units developed by teachers include differentiation in three different levels depending on the students' language skill development. While some teachers set goals for their units, there is no systematic approach by all core subject teachers in setting long- and short-term goals for students to help them understand their next steps in learning.

This school is in the third year of a four-year plan to implement clear indicators of success for students to move from the junior academy in grades 9 and 10 into the senior academy for grades 11 and 12. The goal is to have process skills and content areas identified to move from one level to the next. Presently the goals lack precise measurable outcomes for each interim checkpoint in order to monitor progress effectively and to reinforce ownership and accountability.

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 curriculum offers a wide range of experiences during and after school, including the arts, which provide students with background knowledge to fill in the language gaps as well as prepare them for college. Most teachers provide an engaging curriculum by developing their lessons around project-based learning. This gives students the opportunity to undertake research, solve problems, and be increasingly active learners. Youth development to support students' academic and personal growth is also an integral part of each school day. Teachers meet weekly with their teams for a case management time where the guidance counselor leads the meeting to address student needs and concerns. This meeting determines what the student needs are and a plan is discussed to give the student and their families either internal or external support.

The principal is highly respected by the school community and the conversations with each constituent group validated the high scores the school received on the Learning Environment Survey last fall. Teachers spoke of the tremendous respect that the principal has for them and their opinions on how to improve the school environment as well as student achievement. She has established team and content meetings on a weekly basis in addition to a two-hour professional development time weekly that teachers lead for each other with topics they have identified for their learning. Parents

and students echo the feelings of the teachers and feel very positive about their child's education and the nurturing environment the school provides.

Students enjoy coming to school and classroom instruction engages them, particularly that which allows them to work collaboratively or to experience hands-on activities. There are many examples of well-differentiated instruction across the grades. Many classrooms are involved in rigorous course content. Teachers create student packets that have the resources students need to learn about the topic as well as the lesson activities to support the learning. The resources vary and include the use of picture clues and lower reading level text for students new to English, with an increase in difficulty as they progress from level one up to three. The learning tasks have three different entry points. Students are appreciative that teachers create material they can understand and they feel it has made the transition to learning in English much easier. However, some parents and students who have mastered the three levels would rightly like to see the school offer a more challenging curriculum to prepare students for college. Currently, while teachers differentiate learning tasks, the school does not consistently make purposeful decisions to emphasize the key state standards and performance areas across all core subjects. The expectations for delivering the standards-based curriculum are not clear and lack a support structure with clear progress monitoring checkpoints.

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.

Distributive leadership is very evident at this school. Teachers speak enthusiastically about the opportunities they have to present ideas to the principal and her willingness to support their suggestions for improving the learning for all students. During the collaborative team meetings, a concern rose around students' ability to read. Subsequently, the school formed a literacy council and followed up a suggestion to devote second period to strengthen students reading abilities. It programs students for this time based on need. An Arabic speaking teacher supports a group of Yemeni male students to strengthen their native language and ease the transition into English. Teachers report that these specially designed classes have made a big difference in the comfort level of different student groups, resulting in a more cohesive student body.

The principal and the teachers have created a genuinely collaborative professional learning community. Teachers and other staff meet regularly to review the progress of individual students at team meetings. Risk taking for the sake of improving student achievement is encouraged and valued by all pedagogical staff. Each team has inquiry as part of its team structure. One junior academy team decided after looking at ninth grade student data, to focus their study on why the Latino population fell fifty percent below students with other languages across all subjects. An outcome of the study was the institution of a Spanish literacy class as well as the hiring of a Spanish speaking paraprofessional to assist students in their classes. This team is a good model for the other teams to follow as they look closely at student work and data to engage in collaborative inquiry.

The school does not take a strategic approach to professional development, choosing instead to plan activities as needs arise. In late February, after returning from medical leave of absence, the principal instituted professional teaching standards as an observational tool as well as a component for professional development. A need to focus on student engagement surfaced when the attendance and pass rate started to decline. The principal has been leading professional development sessions modeling

student engagement. Teachers rate themselves on the rubric for student engagement after an observation followed by a comparison with the principal's rating. Teachers decide what area of the student engagement rubric they want to focus on from that discussion. While this is a good beginning for teacher goal setting, there is no yearly professional development plan for teachers aligned with measurable whole school and individual teacher goals or the professional teaching standards and continuum. The lack of a coherent approach to professional development means that the school is not in a position to evaluate the extent to which its training and support activities improve student achievement.

Students feel safe and secure since the move to their new school site in September. The entire school has worked on valuing the diversity where everyone has English as a second language. One student said, "You don't have to lose your country when you come here, it is valued". Students and parents are both appreciative of the caring staff and report, "There is always someone to help you solve a problem no matter how large it is". The school has been successful in establishing some good partnerships with outside agencies from which both students and teachers benefit. Two such partnerships are the International Rescue Community Youth program and the Bard College Collaboration.

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.

School improvement planning lacks formalized systems to monitor progress towards achieving whole school, teacher, and student goals. The school reviews data using the attendance report, scholarship report and the portfolio grades at the end of the semester. Even though it uses this data to make some school decisions, without measurable outcomes against which to measure progress, the school does not know whether its programs and interventions are making a positive difference to student achievement. The monitoring that teams and the principal undertake throughout the year enable the school to check whether procedures are in place and how individual students are performing on interim assessments. Item analysis is also useful in enabling teachers to adjust the curriculum to focus on gaps in learning. However, the school has no way of knowing whether students are making sufficient progress as teachers do not set interim or long-term goals for individual students, nor are goals set for grades or sub-groups based on prior student achievement. This remains an area for improvement and as indicated on last year's Quality Review report.

The principal and her staff have totally embraced the clear vision set from the "Internationals Approach" for student achievement. All teachers are literacy teachers first and then content specialists. Their understanding that they first ground everything they teach in language development is responsible for the rapid rate that students learn to speak English. The principal's vision is that every child will have the necessary skills to attend college. However, without the necessary rigor in goal setting, monitoring, and evaluation, the school is not in a position to know whether its plans are on target or to celebrate its successes.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: International Community High 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.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, which 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