

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The Secondary School for Journalism

Middle – High School 463

237 7th Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11215

Principal: Abbie Reif

Dates of review: December 8 - 9, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Anita Skop

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Secondary School for Journalism is a middle-high school with 444 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 43.46% Black, 46.17% Hispanic, 3.82% White, 5.63% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.67% American Indian/Alaskan students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 39.41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60.58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 86%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Secondary School for Journalism is committed to improving the academic achievement of students and the school's dedicated leadership has unflinchingly targeted all budgetary, personnel and organizational resources towards this goal. The use of data is a key component of this effort and the school has developed a consistent and school wide protocol for collecting and analyzing the summative, formative and student specific information at key intervals throughout the school year. The school analyzes teacher grades for each student at each of six marking periods through the High School Scheduling and Tracking (HSST) reports to identify trends, target students, and reflect on teacher practice. Students self reflect on their successes and their next steps at these intervals as well. The school has two entry-level grades due to its grade 6 through grade 12 configuration. As a result, interdisciplinary teacher teams have been instituted this year at all grade levels, with a special focus on the ninth grade as data has shown this grade to be an area of concern. These teams target individual students and develop strategies that staff use across all content areas to address identified needs. These strategies, which explicitly target student writing, align to school wide Regent's pass rate and credit accumulation goals.

Differentiation, while truly exemplary in several classes, is markedly absent in others, especially in the high school where all student groups are frequently working on the same assignment. This teacher implementation of differentiation reflects the school's need for greater professional development in this area. Instructional technology while available in the school's computer lab and in several laptop carts was not in use in any of the classrooms. The use of technology is also an area of teacher need, as some of the staff have not yet developed a comfort level with data access in the ARIS system. Parent involvement, an identified school-wide goal for improvement, has been historically limited. However, a new parent coordinator and a more dynamic parent's association are now in place to address this issue.

The Secondary School for Journalism has worked very hard to create a distinct identity and to build a strong community that knows each student individually and works to accelerate his or her academic and personal achievement. The school's range of partnerships and collaborations have served as the basis for this focus, but it is the atmosphere of commitment and genuine caring of the leadership and staff that has created the tone of respect and appreciation of scholastic success that permeates the school. The school celebrates the successes of all students. To quote one parent, "This school sees the diamond in the rough in your child."

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school collects and analyzes an extensive variety of summative, formative, and observational data, which enables both leadership and staff to determine school wide needs accurately.
 - Through the strategic use of the HSST system, the school collects and analyzes school-wide, grade level and class specific data at the end of each of the six marking periods. These school scholarship reports enable the administration to determine school trends, identify grade level concerns, and reflect on teacher and student success, resulting in more consistency of focus in instruction in alignment with targeted school-wide goals.
 - Teacher conferencing, rubric based writing projects, and additional sources of authentic student data have deepened teachers' understanding of student needs and sharpened the instructional focus in the classrooms.
- Interdisciplinary inquiry based teacher teams meet at all grade levels, on a weekly basis, providing time for the evaluation of student needs and reflection on instructional strategies.
 - Interdisciplinary teacher teams, which bring together all grade level content area personnel, have resulted in a shared and deep knowledge of all students. This has enabled to staff to align specific support strategies with identified student academic and social needs, improving student achievement and personal commitment to school success.
 - By using data to identify school-wide needs, interdisciplinary teacher teams have targeted writing skills across all content areas. The consistent and universal focus on improving these skills has resulted in the implementation of rubric-based writing and improved student-writing skills across the board.
- The school leadership has consistently focused all of the school's resources on improving student achievement and enhancing instruction.
 - Despite the current budgetary difficulties, the school has remained committed to small class size and push-in teacher support. This has ensured that students are well known to all of their teachers and receive ongoing support during classroom instruction. This has resulted in improved student success, especially in the areas of English language arts and math.
 - Recognizing that the older students are often the after school caregivers for younger siblings, the school utilizes a zero period tutoring support system, defined by a union approved, school based option. During this time, all teachers are available to provide support for students who require assistance in all content areas, improving student achievement throughout the school.

- School staff and students evaluate the success of curricula initiatives and their impact on student achievement at consistent interims throughout the year, enabling students to self reflect on areas of growth and need.
 - Students use their achievement data to assess their growth on reflection checklists at the end of each marking period, six times a year. This checklist and subsequent teacher conferencing, provides students with the opportunity to develop the next steps and take greater ownership for their own academic success.
 - The school's universal use of Cornell note taking as a means to improve student understanding of content area curriculum, was the result of the analysis of student assessments. The implementation of this initiative, in alignment with the school's Regent's pass rate and credit accumulation goals, has already improved student achievement.
- Well developed, long-term partnerships provide strategic support to students and accelerate academic and personal growth.
 - The school's long term commitment to the Advancement Via Individual Determination college preparation program (AVID), has helped students to develop a vision of school success as purposeful and achievable. The program has served as the bedrock upon which the school's celebration of scholastic achievement is built, resulting in high expectations for all students.
 - WYSE, built out of an affiliation with New York University, helps the school address the identified needs of female students, by targeting seventh and eighth grade girls through its same sex girl groups. These build self-esteem, provide role models, and improve attendance.
- The school's culture of mutual respect, appreciation of academic achievement and genuine caring permeates all aspects of school life, generating a commitment to reaching school goals from all constituencies.
 - Teachers and school leadership demonstrate an extraordinary level of in-depth knowledge of their students. This measure of genuine caring and concern sets a tone of mutual respect and appreciation for achievement that is evidenced in the comments of parents and students alike. Students state "there is good community here" and parents reflect that, "school has made her realize that education is something you must work hard at".
 - The school regularly participates in the National Honor Society and promotes departmental and grade level service projects as a means of recognizing the successes of all students, establishing a tone of respect of achievement in every modality.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance the use of differentiated instruction to include a consistently wide range of entry points, modalities, and challenges for all students, and in all content areas.
 - There is a distinct inconsistency of instruction between middle school and high school. While the middle school and several high school teachers do group to meet the learning needs of students, the majority of teachers at upper levels focus on content driven whole class instruction.
 - Teachers frequently seat students in groups, but there is very limited use of differentiated modalities or materials. This restricts the opportunities of both the lower and the higher functioning students. In conversations with parents and students, both constituents felt the work could be, “more challenging”.
- Develop a universal protocol for ongoing communication and deepen the level of outreach in providing feedback on student needs and achievement to students and families.
 - The school has acknowledged the need to deepen the level of outreach to parents. To this end, it has hired a new parent coordinator, and instituted a phone messaging system. However, there is limited parental interaction with the school, most specifically at the high school level, which has an impact on attendance and achievement.
- Expand the opportunities for professional development in the alignment of data analysis and instruction, in order to increase the capacity to meet the needs of all students.
 - Based on the instructional practices teachers implement, they do not have a clear understanding of what differentiation is. Professional development in this area and in the use of data to drive instruction is an area of need that consistently influences student success and teacher capacity.
 - While the school has implemented interdisciplinary teacher teams on all grade levels, it has no protocols in place yet for assessing the functionality and success of those teams.
- Increase the use of technology by both students and staff in accordance with the school’s journalism focus, and the demands of the twenty-first century.
 - Teacher use of technology to access records, and student data is limited in many cases and the school focuses largely on hardcopy records. This limits the depth of understanding of the needs of students for some of the staff.
 - Student use of technology as an instructional tool is not in place as a consistent, ongoing component of classroom instruction.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Secondary School for Journalism	Δ	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed