

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The NYC iSchool
High School 376
131 Avenue of the Americas
New York
NY 10013

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Lead Reviewer: Robert Lewis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The NYC iSchool is a high school with 202 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 24% Black, 44% Hispanic, 22% White, and 9% Asian students. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 42% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 95.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The NYC iSchool opened last year and shares a building with one other high school. The school's curricula for online and "live" instruction draw upon State standards and the key identified school competencies of authentic learning, problem solving, use of technology, differentiation of learning experiences and collaboration, to provide a rigorous and high-interest high school education for all students. As a result, many students express high enthusiasm about their learning experiences and their increased academic improvement compared to their middle school experiences. The school maintains warm and caring relationships throughout the learning community that afford students the academic and social support that they need to experience success in school. In addition, the student advisory structure develops significant decision-making capabilities for students, including school policy, activity planning, and purchasing.

The school leadership places heavy emphasis on providing opportunities for collaboration to enable teachers to improve their instruction, reflect on practice, analyze data, and engage in goal setting. At the iSchool, each teacher is allocated a mentor/coach, and routinely receives classroom observations and actionable feedback in an effort to improve classroom instruction, lesson design, and curriculum to accelerate student progress. The school also engages in weekly collaborative processes to share instructional strategies, critique colleagues' work, and analyze data in order to adjust learning experiences to meet students' needs. While there is a lack of evidence to show an extensive evaluation of school-wide data collection and analysis of targeted groups, the staff fully engages in the practice of monitoring goals and evaluating the impact of actions taken. These processes drive continual improvement of teaching designed to raise student achievement.

The school uses collaborative processes for annual and interim goal setting at school level, content area, group, and individual student perspectives. In addition to setting annual goals, teams of teachers meet quarterly to review student achievement data, measure student progress, and make necessary adjustments to instructional, interim, and instructional goals. All parents play an active role in the tracking of progress and setting of individual goals for their children. However, their role in goal setting activities at a school level to promote parent ownership and responsibility for the school's direction is largely limited to the parent teacher association and parent members on the school leadership team. The school has yet find an effective way of increasing the current level of parental involvement so that a significant number of parents can take on leadership roles, assume greater responsibility for the school's success and have a larger investment in the school's future.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The standards-based school curriculum offers a wide range of rigorous experiences and choices to meet the diverse learning needs of students through the extensive application of technology.
 - The curriculum stresses the key experiences and competencies of solving real-world problems, learning through collaborative processes, differentiation of learning experiences, and the use of technology as a learning and problem-solving tool. Online classes are systematically used to prepare students for the Living Environment, Global Studies and US history Regents exams. This self-paced curricula permits individual students to master required material at their own pace. Mandatory supplemental “live” classroom instruction for students who are struggling, and extension seminars for advanced students are embedded within the online curriculum to challenge and engage students at all levels.
 - The curriculum provides nine-week learning modules such as forensics, debate, and environmental issues to solve authentic problems presented by iSchool clients such as the 9/11 Museum Commission, Human Rights Watch, and the Chancellor. These learning modules are designed to accommodate various learning styles and interests, while addressing the school’s key learning competencies.
- Relationships among students, teachers, and school leaders are warm and respectful, resulting in an environment that is conducive to learning and supports the growth of students well.
 - Students know that they can turn to the principal, faculty advisors, guidance counselor, and various teachers throughout the school to provide them with the emotional and academic support that they need to succeed in school. Students strongly appreciate the opportunities teachers afford them before and after school hours, student advisory period, office hours, and lunch to receive group and individualized instruction to bolster their academic performance and support their social and emotional needs.
 - Students have an active voice that influences school-wide decisions. For example, student advisory groups choose literature for the school library, participate in the admissions process, plan school-wide events, and the student government oversees the school’s environmental beauty plan. These opportunities develop student’s leadership skills and result in strong ownership of school structures and systems.
- The school engages in frequent communication with families regarding student needs, progress, and outcomes.
 - The school staff requires all parents to engage in student-led conferences at the end of each 9 week quarter. Prior to these conferences, students perform a guided reflection with their advisor to predict grades for the upcoming term, perform a comparison analysis of grades earned and grades predicted, discuss next learning steps and set interim and long-

term goals for the upcoming term. Students then present this reflection to their parents at the conference. In addition, the school uses a web-based program to give parents and students 24-hour “real time” grades for all subject areas. As a result, parents are actively engaged in students’ learning on a consistent basis.

- The school has established effective systems for monitoring teaching practices to provide a clear focus on improving instructional practices.
 - All teachers receive classroom observations at least once per week by one of the co-principals or principal interns. After each observation, the school leadership provides feedback on the efficacy of the observed instruction and sets short-term instructional goals that they measure and evaluate after the next scheduled observation. In addition, the school leadership is assigned to at least one teacher as their mentor/coach to review data and student work. These coaches meet bi-weekly with veteran teachers and weekly with novice and struggling teachers. These systems enable teachers and their coaches to adjust classroom strategies, lesson design, and the curriculum to increase student achievement.
- Professional collaboration is a high priority and faculty benefit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and team members.
 - Weekly half-day professional development sessions allow teachers to share, critique, and improve each other’s work through an inquiry protocol to improve instruction. The process resulted in a significant change to a humanities debate module to develop student comprehension of social service spending and its implications for American society. Teachers introduced enhanced scaffolding techniques to ensure that all their students were effectively supported in understanding the complex concepts involved in the work.
 - All content area teachers plan collaboratively for course modules, math curriculum and online courses, sharing experiences and expertise to construct rigorous curriculum with State and “key” school standard alignment. A collaborative experience of particular note is the quarterly “Fed-Ex Day” activity that allows staff members to collaborate on a school problem outside of their core competency area. As a result, teachers created new peer tutoring centers and an improved assessment tool for online classes, both of which are impacting positively on student progress.
- The school uses collaborative, data-informed processes to create suitable, on-going planning and goal setting across grades, subjects, and for individuals and groups of students.
 - The school sets goals through data analysis of Regents exams, online and “live” course data, interim student admissions data, and targeted-group achievement data on an annual and interim basis. Initial student achievement goals are set on a school, team, and targeted group level through yearly retreat, grade-level and content area meetings. The school revisits action plan goals every nine weeks by a review of interim measurements, and goals are changed or adjusted at that time to meet identified needs.

- On an individual student level, yearly and interim goals across the content areas are set through the student- led family conference held at the beginning of each year. During these conferences, the student, parents, and academic advisor set goals, reflect on the rate of academic progress and decide on the next steps required to maximize achievement. This enables all students to be closely monitored during the year to check that their progress continues as expected.
- In response to visionary leadership, teachers fully embrace the practice of monitoring goals and evaluating the impact of their actions to drive continual improvement of teaching and raise student achievement.
 - Teachers constantly review interim goals, and make data-based predictions about school-wide, grade, and classroom achievement on a quarterly basis. In addition, online student achievement data and goals are reviewed weekly. This process led to significant revisions to an American colonial history online course to better meet student needs and improve results. Through their tracking of student progress in grade 10 English language arts, staff realized the need to differentiate the curriculum by adding a self-paced online course and creating literature-based courses to prepare students for the English language arts Regents exam. Both innovations are showing early signs of success on student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the use of data analysis to evaluate and adjust data aggregation and organization on a school-wide level to measure progress and growth for targeted groups.
 - Although the school routinely evaluates the quality of data, tools and analysis on a school-wide and individual basis, extensive evaluation of data presentation for targeted groups is less well defined.
- Expand parent involvement and leadership in important school activities and decision-making processes to increase their investment in the success of the school.
 - The school maintains an active parent teacher association and several parents are members of the school leadership team. However, only a small proportion of parents actively participate in leadership and decision making roles, reducing opportunities for involvement in the development of the school.
- Ensure that all constituent groups are involved in setting school-level goals to promote universal ownership and responsibility for the school's direction.
 - Although the school goes to great lengths to include all families in the setting of individual student achievement goals throughout the year, the inclusion of parents in setting school-level goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan is the responsibility of the small number of parents who are on the school leadership team.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: NYC iSchool	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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