

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Life Sciences Secondary School**

**Middle - High School 655**

**320 East 96<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York  
NY 10128**

**Principal: Genevieve Stanislaus**

**Dates of review: November 9 -10, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Doris Unger**

## Part 1: The school context

Life Sciences Secondary School is a combined middle-high school with 706 students from grades 6 through 12. The school population comprises 30% Black, 65% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 87%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The principal is a passionate leader whose vision drives school improvement. She has created a climate of respect among students and faculty with a commitment to improving student outcomes. The collection and analysis of data gives the school an overview of its strength and areas to develop. State and City test results are used to monitor middle school achievement and to identify student needs to allow for a successful transition to high school. Guidance staff meet regularly with over-aged/under-credited students who are off-track to review transcripts, monitor credit accumulation, Regents results and progress towards graduation with a focus on college readiness. Helpful additional programs in literacy and math are offered over an extended day and Saturday school. Data is used to place students in elective courses and programs, depending on need, to that which may span two or three semesters and this support is leading to an increase in credit accumulation and Regents pass results. However, teachers have yet to develop a consistent approach in using tools to organize data and access it independently. This lack limits their capacity to readily use assessments to inform them about trends in student performance in order to better make classroom-level decisions. Although the school has been proactive in using external staff developers to help with successful instructional practices, the school's ability to implement differentiated instructional strategies that address the needs of all students including specific group populations is not established fully.

The school follows a curriculum aligned to meet as well as exceed middle school requirements, paving the way for students to accelerate to honors and Advanced Placement classes within their high school careers. Opportunities are provided for students to excel by offering not only Advanced Placement courses but internships with John Jay College and college credit courses as well. Although school leaders and faculty have high expectations the effectiveness of the communication is weakened, as there is inconsistent use of translation services and other support services that might encourage a greater parent involvement. The quality of feedback to students and their families is variable across teachers.

Teachers, including those new to the school, engage in structured and informal professional collaboration and are provided with differentiated support and feedback from mentors but the school makes too few occasions to foster distributed leadership amongst staff. The lack of such structures has kept the school from developing internal capacity to support and embed routines that are characteristic of a successful professional collaborative learning community. It has teams looking into matters to do with deficient learners but there are limited teacher ownership and engagement in the inquiry process. Currently, few teachers have leadership roles in assessing classroom routines, examining and comparing student work and establishing common practices that lead to improved student outcomes.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school provides a safe environment conducive to student and adult learning where students and adults are treated with respect.
  - Students are well mannered, motivated and show an interest in their education.
  - Students demonstrate a trust and respect for their school, the faculty and the administration.
- School leaders align curricula to State standards and make good decisions supporting the needs of students, allocating resources that reflect the school's instructional goals
  - The administration allocates resources to all academic subjects. Beyond the academics, they provide physical education, music, and arts education above that of State mandates and requirements. There is a commitment to present opportunities for student interaction and leadership development in physical education and to accommodate a wide range of student interests including offering playing in the band and music production. There are high levels of engagement and participation in these classes.
  - Advanced Placement courses in government, English literature, English composition, and economics have been created to meet the needs of those students capable of high achievement providing them with higher levels of challenge and a platform for introducing and supporting college readiness skills.
- School leaders and faculty, gather, analyze and share data to identify an overview of the school's strengths and areas of need.
  - The administration prepares and presents school-wide data to staff for discussion and investigation.
  - Mentors are assigned to new staff members who may need assistance using the data to direct lesson planning.
- School leaders make decisions around student programming and teacher assignments aligned to the school's instructional goals and to meet the broad range of student learning needs.
  - The administration is highly responsive to programming teachers to their interests and areas of expertise. The depth of knowledge provided by teachers competent in specific subjects and topics lead to greater student understanding, engagement and motivation.
  - Earth Science is offered in a two-semester sequence or a three-semester sequence based on student ability. Students who have an identified need to have the curriculum extended over three semesters are programmed to

receive the extra semester to allow them time to master the full range of content. This is leading to greater success in both credit accumulation and Regents pass results.

- Teacher schedules are created to allow for grade and subject staff to meet with coaches/mentors and interact with colleagues.
- The school provides differentiated support for teachers based on identified pedagogical needs as well as content knowledge needs through mentoring, with special attention to supporting teachers new to the school or profession.
  - A focus for professional development is reflected in the principal's support of all teachers. The administration contracts New York University staff developers to work individually and collectively with new teachers and subject specific departments.
  - New teachers work one-to-one with mentors who introduce them to classroom management strategies and practices, assistance with lesson planning and providing them with opportunities to reflect on lessons with the goal of improving classroom instruction that will lead to improved student outcomes.
- The school provides professional learning opportunities aligned to curricula that reflect the school's beliefs in how people learn best. Grade teams and subject teams meet regularly.
  - The school encourages a culture of professional learning communities by providing space where teachers can gather to formally and informally share best practices.
  - The main focus for the inquiry teams is in identifying those students at risk of failing and analyzing ways in which assistance may be given to deficient learners. To discuss these and other points regular meetings are held.

### **What the school needs to improve**

Extend the use of data by tracking progress and adjusting school-wide plans and goals during the course of the year based on data collected through a common assessment.

- Teacher and teacher teams do not reflect sufficiently on student outcome data to identify learning targets, choose instructional strategies, and independently use data to consistently monitor student progress in order to assist in the revision of instructional practice to improve student outcomes.
- They have yet to develop a range of materials and activities matched to cope with the full range of students' different capabilities.
- Seek ways to support the active participation of parents in the school community and promote their leadership in school activities and decisions by better communicating how they can support the school's high expectations.

- Translation services, both written and oral, are not sufficiently established to encourage parent involvement and enable active participation.
- The practice of providing feedback to students and their families is inconsistent across teachers.
- Ensure that teachers target the needs of special education students and English language learners by establishing interim and long-term goals for individual and sub-groups.
  - Teachers do not use data to explicitly establish interim and long-term goals based on students' strengths and weaknesses.
  - Classroom routines do not provide sufficient variation and entry points in programs for students and sub-groups working at different levels.
- Create structures to support school's ability to build capacity.
  - The school has not created structures to support distributed leadership, specifically through the development of teacher teams, who can engage in the decision-making process by regularly evaluating teacher and instructional effectiveness.

## School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: Life Sciences Secondary School</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design and deliver rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?		<b>X</b>		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

**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 its 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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>