

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Newcomers High School**

**High School 555  
28-01 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue  
Long Island City  
NY 11101**

**Principal: Orlando Sarmiento**

**Dates of review: April 22-23, 2010  
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Grossman**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Newcomers High School is a high school with 864 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 5% Black, 57% Hispanic, 6% White, and 32% Asian students. The student body includes 100% English language learners and 0% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 89.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is well developed.**

Newcomers High School serves only new immigrant students, almost all of whom arrive, on a daily basis, with no English language skills and often with little to no prior formal education. The students speak dozens of different native languages. The passionate teaching staff and the deeply committed principal see these facts as assets, and embrace the challenge of preparing them for college, and for full integration into American society, in a relatively short amount of time. Students and parents at the school express boundless appreciation for the extensive scholastic, athletic, and extracurricular opportunities they are given and the accelerated pace at which they are acculturated and taught English. In the words of one student, "We all speak different languages, but we all speak a common language, the common language of immigrants and dreams." A rich, linguistically dynamic array of courses and research based, effective pedagogical approaches accelerates the learning of English, and provides students with a well-rounded education that includes the arts, music, and many opportunities to think critically.

The school does an excellent job supporting the social and emotional development of its students, with a particular understanding of how to ease their transition to a new country, language and school all at the same time. By nature and design, the school is differentiated in its offerings to ensure that every student is placed in the situation that is best for their learning. The teaching staff has been strengthened further by the formalization of collaborative structures that have always been at the heart of the school. The development of inquiry teams in which every teacher participates and the work of two broad-based committees that are charged with updating, revising, and continually aligning curricula have all elevated the level of professional conversation. These teams have also fostered teacher leadership that is helping to ensure a continual process of reflection and growth in this already successful school.

School leaders, in particular the principal who is new in his role this year, have done a commendable job recognizing the issues still to be addressed and making transparent the urgency around these issues. There has been good analysis of school wide data that has led to understandings around achievement of different subgroups. These understandings, however, are not yet drilled down to all teachers in all classes, and there is not yet a fully developed sense that there are practices everyone must own together and be accountable for together. The school is working to address the inconsistencies around effective and meaningful feedback practices and about the use of classroom level data and its impact on school-wide outcomes.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Multifaceted curricula that reflect best practices are the result of strong beliefs about serving English language learners. (1.1.1.2)
  - A rich, engaging approach to learning English is evident throughout the school. The integration of arts, drama, music, public speaking opportunities, multi-media offerings, word building, group activities and exciting partnerships with outside organizations all heavily support language acquisition, accelerating the pace at which students acquire high levels of English.
  - Teachers utilize a process known as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol to frame lessons and deliver rigorous standards based content lessons that develop language and higher order thinking skills simultaneously, preparing significant numbers of newly arrived students for college at a rapid pace.
- The school provides a safe environment for its unique population, in which students are supported and are supportive of the learning of others. (1.4)
  - Students eagerly take advantage of the many opportunities, and easily describe, numerous ways in which their learning has been fostered at the school, whether by “learning from our mistakes” or through participation in internships, sports, and clubs that promote the learning of English. Students who are struggling in acquiring English are most notably encouraged and assisted by their own peers, even those who speak different native languages.
  - Parents adamantly express how well their children are known and supported as individuals. New students arrive daily and are immediately integrated fully into the community, assessed for English and academic levels and placed into the appropriate classes. Extensive guidance supports help students acculturate and ease their transition.
- Effective professional learning opportunities develop teachers at all levels of practice and elevate school-wide instructional practices. (4.1)
  - A long-practiced buddy system was described by many teachers as having been key to their own integration to the school and helping them better understand the techniques most useful to English language learners, and to contributing a sense of coherency in pedagogy.
  - Differentiated support and effective feedback from administrators reflect the distinct population each teacher serves, so that bilingual, ESL, native language arts, and content teachers are all expected to be on the cutting edge of their disciplines. This is helpful in creating uniform expectations for the quality of pedagogy while meeting individual teachers where their needs are.
- Collaborative teams enhance the already strong professional and reflective professional culture in the school. (4.2)

- Inquiry teams are cross-functional and have greatly increased coherence across disciplines and student levels. Specific inquiries have enabled the teachers to dig deeply into their relevant data and uncover patterns and trends of which they were not previously aware, enabling them to modify curricula.
- Effective distributed leadership structures tap in to the strengths of individual teachers. Some teachers are leading the technological advancements in the school; others are leading the efforts to drive instruction using relevant data; still others are leading the efforts to strengthen communal aspects and use of protocols.
- High expectations are well understood, owned and enacted by the entire community, emanating a seriousness of purpose throughout the school. (3.4)
  - Everyone in the school is focused on accelerating the acquisition of English for the students, preparing them for college and engaging them in American civic life. Students feel comfortable taking risks with their learning in order to grow, knowing they will be supported in doing so. Students speak with great passion about the school opening the door to the American dream.
  - Parents agree that they are integral to the school's mission. They are involved in school decision making to a high degree, appreciate the opportunities to learn alongside their children, and are kept constantly aware of their children's progress via phone calls and a truly open door policy. The school goes to great effort to ensure that language is not a barrier to parent participation.
- Ongoing evaluation has enabled highly reflective school leadership to make effective organizational changes that have resulted in greater alignment and coherence across the school.(5.1)
  - School leaders have developed an ambitious plan to have teacher teams re-align both the ESL and interdisciplinary curricula so that there are clear delineations of accountability and aligned resource use. This has ensured the investment of the teaching staff and has enabled the school to embrace its successes while remaining firmly rooted in the process of reflection.
  - A complete re-alignment of guidance services has changed the way youth development and academics are intertwined. Counselors now follow the same students through their entire journey at Newcomers High School, fostering deeper relationships and offering a more individualized approach.
- Thorough analysis of relevant data enables school leaders to plan for continued improvement. (2.1)
  - Concerns about particular subgroups have been identified. There is a sense of urgency around the disparities in overall achievement levels between different populations of students and between different measures of outcomes, and this sense of urgency has helped to drive continual reform efforts at the school.

- School leadership meet regularly to review critical data and make determinations about interventions and curricular adjustments. Weekly seminars are designed to meet precise needs identified in data and foster readiness for specific Regents' exams. Extensive after school and Saturday programs provide additional support.

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

- Embed feedback and assessment practices consistently across all language levels, content areas, and courses, to ensure a more seamless and reflective experience for students. (2.4)
  - There are some exemplary on-the-spot and written feedback practices in place; however, these practices are not widely adhered to by all teachers in all courses. As a result, expectations for quality of work vary such that not all students are clear about their precise next goals to achieve in each course.
  - There is some evidence of reflective practices for students being developed in a number of classrooms. In several classrooms, however, opportunities are missed to engage the students in the kind of reflection that will help them take even more ownership of their learning. As a result, some students are too passive in their approach to learning English and meeting content standards.
- Use classroom data vigorously so that teacher teams and individual teachers are able to measure more precise improvement targets for groups of students. (2.2,3.3)
  - Although the school has taken good steps to meet targets on a larger scale, some teacher teams and some classrooms are not yet focusing on how classroom level data can inform school-wide goals. There is not, for example, an ongoing comparative analysis of the outcomes at each level of learning English, and how those outcomes differ in different native languages and relate to content outcomes. There are data collection systems in place that can support this endeavor.
  - While the curriculum mapping initiative is currently focused on the building of common resources, it is not yet focused on the building of common assessments to measure the effectiveness of those resources, creating an inconsistency around which standards are being met at certain times in differing populations.
- Develop more rigorous systems for regularly measuring the progress towards interim and long term goals to ensure that accountability for student progress is shared. (5.3)
  - Although school leaders are highly reflective and engage in robust annual school planning processes, not all teachers and teacher teams are measuring how their own classroom practice is contributing to, and reflected in, the overall outcomes. Efforts to create a collective understanding of this are underway though not yet fully cemented. As a result, it is challenging to judge if the overall goals will be met and how to adjust plans to ensure that they are met.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Newcomers High School	△	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: 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 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
<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?				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	

<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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>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.</b>							
<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>				<b>X</b>			
<b>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.</b>							
<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>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>