

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

High School for Legal Studies

K477

**850 Grand Street
Brooklyn, NY 11211**

Principal: Monica Ortiz

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Lead Reviewer: Eve Bois

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

School for Legal Studies is a High school with 834 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 62% Black, 35% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 79.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Administrators and teachers use a range of assessment data to monitor school-level needs and student progress, plan instruction, and create intervention strategies, which leads to improved outcomes for students. (2.1)
 - Item analysis of summative assessments identifies areas of challenge for students, resulting in modifications to curriculum, school practices, and student groupings in classrooms. For example, when data revealed that students in integrated co-teaching (ICT) classes were not performing as well as their peers, school administration discovered that instruction and teaching practices in those classrooms needed improvement, particularly the team-teaching approach. The Network provided these teachers with professional development around effective co-teaching models, which were implemented and supported by administration. As a result, students in these classes are passing more frequently and taking more Regents exams, which result in improved student outcomes. In 2011, there were a total of 14 students with disabilities (SWD) with eight receiving local diplomas and one receiving an IEP diploma. Out of a total of 26 SWD students in 2012, five will receive local diplomas and eight will receive Regents diplomas. These students have met graduation requirements, with an additional three students waiting on exam results.
- Professional collaboration is a high priority and faculty benefit from opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and members of the teaching community. (4.2)
 - All teachers in the school are on department teams that meet regularly to review various assessments and identify strengths, weaknesses, and patterns. Teams use protocols to evaluate assignments, student work, and identify instructional strategies and areas for growth. Furthermore, teachers participate in inter-visitations, which lead to an increased confidence in sharing and revising practices. As a result, best practices are shared among teachers and result in improved student performance.
 - There are multiple opportunities for teachers to play a key role in decisions that affect student learning, particularly in identifying the types of professional development they want and need in order to impact their instruction. Examples include a faculty-comprised professional development committee that determines and supports the needs of teachers, teacher representation on the Core Inquiry Team who meet to discuss the needs of individual and subgroups of students, collaborative teacher teams who have ownership over their classroom approach that is supported by ongoing professional development and observations, and a fairly new peer-to-peer observation model that was implemented earlier in the year. Teachers have many entry-points for building leadership capacity, including self-identifying or being selected by the principal and assistant principals. As such, teachers share taking the lead in decision-making. Formal and informal observations reveal that teachers are who

actively participate in leadership roles are more confident and, in some cases, have higher passing Regents scores for the students they teach.

- The use of differentiated practices support student needs and results in student engagement, good behavior, and enthusiasm for learning that inspires them to pursue their goals. (1.2)
 - The school shares a common belief that students learn best when they are engaged at appropriate levels through instruction that targets their needs and scaffolds learning. Faculty recognizes that differentiated instruction is a key strategy for supporting this belief. A common lesson planning template guides teachers through designing lessons that include multiple entry points and resources for diverse learners. Across classrooms, differentiation strategies include purposeful student groupings, varied resources, the use of stations, opportunities for student choice, and peer-to-peer feedback. As a result, student engagement is generally high and leads to lively conversation, as evidenced in more than one classroom visited. Teachers look to each other for ideas, often modifying a best practice so it is more responsive to their class's needs. A math teacher tried a colleague's "stations" approach to learning and found it unsuccessful for her classroom due to the class size and layout. She changed the strategy to a "choice board" with tiered prompts and saw improved performance and higher engagement among her students, particularly those with disabilities.
- The principal and her cabinet implement an ongoing schedule of formal and informal observations to evaluate teaching and determine professional development plans for teachers at all levels of practice. (4.1)
 - Regularly scheduled formal observations and informal walkthroughs by school leaders enable teachers to promptly receive verbal and written feedback. As a result, one teacher with classroom management challenges was able to receive targeted support that led to an improved rapport with students as evidenced by a decrease in the administration's need to be present in the teacher's classroom for classroom management. The principal has designed a system to review feedback from the cabinet on teacher performance, and student data to target teacher needs. For example, several teachers who struggle to meet the needs of students with learning challenges and poor attendance received professional development focused on differentiating learning as a means to engage this subgroup more meaningfully and consistently. Data reveals that these students' grades and performance has improved.
- School leaders make organizational decisions that are supportive of developing a professional learning community of teachers and increasing instructional capacity. (1.3)
 - With a limited budget and an excess of teachers due to register loss, the principal has strategically organized staff and resources to support teaching and learning. For example, to advance the school wide goal of improving students' writing, an ELA teacher was reassigned and trained to be the school's literacy coach. Working alongside each teacher, she analyzes their data, student work and lesson plans to help them target their instruction to meet students' need. As a result, teachers are able to

use online and classroom data to set better goals, as evidenced in their lesson planning and student outcomes.

- Teacher teams meet weekly during common planning time to analyze student work, pinpoint learning needs, and design targeted instruction. As a result, organizational decisions reflect teams' efforts, such as the decision to rethink a double block of Global History when data revealed it is not significantly increasing student pass rates. Teams' analyses also led to an understanding of the different needs of incoming cohorts of students, and enables teachers to target instructional supports as a result.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that tasks and curricula are rigorous in that they consistently engage all learners, include critical thinking skills, and result in higher order student work products. (1.1)
 - Although teachers plan learning activities that include differentiation, tasks across classrooms are not consistently rigorous and student work does not consistently illustrate higher order thinking. In one classroom, students were actively engaged in responding to the teacher's questions, but the questions were primarily at a recall level and didn't encourage students to elaborate or extend their reasoning. In another classroom, students were grouped to complete a lab that largely involved identification and had no extensions to develop students' higher order thinking skills. As a result, the lack of consistent rigor across classrooms minimizes the school's ability to engage students in developing the skills needed to produce extended responses and high level work products.
- Build upon communication and collaboration with parents to increase their capacity to assist in their child's learning and enable a greater percentage of parents to track progress toward attaining set goals. (2.4)
 - The school uses an electronic data system for tracking grades and communicating with families. However, teachers' use of the system is inconsistent, information is not always updated in a timely manner, and none of the parents in the group meeting had ever accessed it. As a result, some families do not have current information to support their child's learning. Additionally, although the school maintains a website for sharing information, the curriculum is only posted for one or two classes. As a result, parents do not have access to specific information such as content and skill objectives in order to support their child's learning and monitoring of their progress toward meeting learning goals.
 - The School Leadership Team (SLT) is currently where parents have conversations about what happens at the school. However, this engages a small portion of the parent population, thus limiting the ability for a wider range of parents to play a role in school decision-making.
- Establish greater consistency in communicating high expectations to students and their families on student achievement to promote and support improvements in student learning. (3.4)

- Although students develop goals in core subject areas at the beginning of each semester, the practice is not implemented across all classrooms. Additionally, several students say that although they set goals, little or no follow up takes place, and the goals serve little purpose. While the school's online grading system enables teachers to track student performance, not all teachers use the system consistently or comprehensively. While these strategies attempt to provide direction for students, the inconsistency with which they are implemented, along with a lack of short-term objectives, prevents all students from knowing whether they are on track to meeting the expectations for success and minimizes their ability to take ownership of their learning. The school provides families with limited monthly communication that addresses such topics as school dress code, preparedness, and opportunities for credit recovery and tutoring; but a strategy for real-time communication with parents around daily attendance has yet to be developed. The lack of a system hinders opportunities for parents to be active partners in moving their children to the next level of academic and personal growth.
- Further expand the present systems for evaluating the collection and monitoring of data relative to student progress to ensure the information is used effectively to increase coherence of practices across the school. (5.2)
 - While the school uses data to determine school wide strengths, there is an inconsistency across the school in teacher grading practices. Consequently, the lack of coherence across the school in the use of the current grading system impacts the school's ability to effectively inform adjustments to assessments and grading policies.
 - Although students understand the concept of data and how it should enable them to focus on their learning goals, there is no formal system in place to regularly provide families with their children's performance data. As a result, the school's ability to make timely adjustments to policies and practices is limited and lessens students' and families understanding of next steps for academic growth.
- Formalize the system of evaluating the efforts of teams of teachers to strengthen the impact of their work. (5.4)
 - Although the assistant principals are expected to provide the principal with regular feedback on the effectiveness of teacher teams, reporting is inconsistent and there are no formal guidelines that inform team expectations to help evaluate their impact. Leadership development opportunities are evaluated but the system used is largely anecdotal and based on the principal's observations of who (and how many) are taking advantage of leadership opportunities. The lack of formalized systems for defining team expectations results in missed opportunities for adult learning and teacher leader development.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: High School for Legal Studies	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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	
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?		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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed