



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Brooklyn Community High School for
Communications, Arts and Media**

**High School 412
70 Tompkins Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Dr James O'Brien

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Reviewer: Stephanie Krusa

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation
How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Brooklyn Community High School for Communications, Arts and Media opened as an empowerment school. In June 2007 it will have completed its first year with 104 9th grade students. A new freshman class, and cohort of additional teachers, will be added over each of the next three years, as the school grows to serve students in grades 9 through 12. Just below 23% of those currently enrolled are special education students, which is significantly above the average for similar and City schools. English language learners make up 3% of students, a much lower percentage than found in similar and City schools. Students recently arrived in the country are mainly from Africa and the Caribbean.

Black students account for over 95% of the student body and Hispanic students make up the remaining 5%. This year the school shares space with four other schools, but it will open in September 2007 in a newly renovated building in the Clinton Hill and Bedford Stuyvesant areas of Brooklyn. Student attendance is 85%, which is slightly above that of similar and City schools. This is a Title 1 school with 70% of students eligible, which is above that of City and similar schools.

As an empowerment school it has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. This school is currently engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessment materials.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides exceptional leadership and has established a rigorous academic and arts program in this first year of the school.
- Teachers and administrators share a common vision and fully expect that all students will progress well.
- Close attention is paid to the academic, social and emotional development of every student and strong supports are in place to enable effective learning.
- Instruction in the disciplines, including arts and media, is uniformly challenging.
- Carefully targeted instruction addresses the needs of special education students.
- The school works closely with parents, who are very pleased with the attention given their children, the level of learning and the accessibility of staff.
- Students feel respected and are appreciative of the efforts made by staff to assist them, academically and personally.
- Effective structures are in place so that the school runs smoothly.

What the school needs to improve

- Better coordinate the system for organizing data so that student baseline information in each discipline is accessible in September for effective planning.
- Strengthen goal-setting processes with parents.
- Structure time for collegial sharing, in-house and with staff from similar schools, to strengthen processes for managing and analyzing data, setting goals and differentiating instruction.
- Continue to formalize student portfolios to demonstrate progress over time and to facilitate management of their own learning.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Brooklyn Community High School for Communications, Arts and Media was established in September 2006. Its purpose is to provide resident families with a small innovative high school that stresses a rigorous State Regents and college preparation program, strong family and community partnerships and a four year emphasis on communications, arts and media literacy. The school partners with the Institute for Student Achievement to develop inquiry-based and project-based instruction and align professional development to the needs of students and staff.

The principal and staff opted to open as an empowerment school and designed the assessment system used to capture all necessary data. Although the system is comprehensive, initial baseline assessment of students did not occur early enough this first year, an issue the principal acknowledges and is addressing for the fall. The staff effectively gathers and analyzes formal and informal data throughout the year to understand and scaffold student progress. Goals and plans are revised as new data develops and in response to the ongoing study of student work.

Teachers are highly committed to students and expect them to achieve on or above grade. For example, all 9th grade students with sufficient laboratory hours will be sitting for the earth science Regents this June, a year ahead of schedule. They prepared for this by attending Saturday classes throughout the year. There are effective systems in place to support students who struggle, including extended day classes, mandatory tutoring and an advisory program which pairs every student with a personal mentor from the staff.

As students reach their senior year, they are expected to have developed six portfolios; one for each of the core disciplines, English, mathematics, science and history, and portfolios in personal autobiography and the communication arts, to meet the school's graduation requirements. In addition, students are expected to pass five Regents exams and receive a Regents diploma. Students and parents are impressed and grateful for the strong academic program, the personal interest and attention received and the efforts made by the school and staff on their behalf.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses data to track progress for all students across the grade, and for classes and groups. The staff has developed a comprehensive assessment system, but student baseline information was not firmly developed in September, causing a delay in the goal-setting process. In addition, data has not been sufficiently analyzed to provide a clear understanding of the progress and needs of English language learners, males and females and students from different ethnic backgrounds. The principal has identified these areas as

priorities for summer planning so that staff will be proactively developing student baseline assessments and a tighter process for ongoing data analysis before school opens in September.

All teachers work together to develop informal classroom assessments and formal tests, which assess learning for academic units of study. Together, they also review student results, across the disciplines. For example, semester final exams are collaboratively graded, to inform all staff members about the content and skills students are working on in each class and to get a full picture of student performance across disciplines. This also supports staff in interdisciplinary planning. Student performance is compared against that of 9th graders in similar schools to judge overall progress. Comparisons are also made for each content area, across classrooms to determine the progress of each and inform planning.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

School designed assessments are effectively used to define student needs and plan next instructional steps. Staff works closely with students to discuss learning goals and involve them in attaining those goals. Student progress toward goals is closely monitored, with tight timeframes for mastery. The school has been effectively setting and revising goals in response to ongoing collection of data. Progress is closely reviewed for every student, even though the school did not sufficiently focus on disaggregated groups, except for students with individual education plans. Plans are in place to more closely monitor any performance gaps between students of various ethnicities, between English proficient and English language learners and between males and females. Plans are also in place to address changes in achievement for all groups.

There is an effective support system for students who are struggling. For example, the assistant principal, an experienced special education teacher, pushes into classes daily to mentor, model and confer about students. She also co-designs curriculum, and involves teachers in revision of individual education plans, to insure that instruction carefully targets the needs of special education students.

The school culture is one of high expectations for all students. A mandatory credit recovery program provides struggling students with small group instruction during and after school, enabling them to complete course requirements and stay on track to graduate with classmates. Formal assessment reports, conducted eight times during the year, provide students and families with ongoing communication about academic standing. The school works closely with parents who are very pleased with the attention given to their children, the level of learning and the accessibility of staff. Even so, parents are not sufficiently involved in goal setting, though the principal is confident this will improve when the school moves in June to the neighborhood where most school families reside.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The curriculum is carefully designed to align with the State’s scope and sequence for each discipline, and to correlate with Regents exams. The staff work closely with the Institute for Student Achievement to develop an inquiry and project-based curriculum which embeds critical thinking, problem solving and effective work habits. Curriculum is also designed to match the needs of every student by offering choice and self-management of student-designed projects. Instruction in the disciplines, including arts and media, is uniformly rigorous and students are highly engaged and challenged by their courses. Accountability for student achievement is shared, though advisors are responsible for tracking progress for their students and sharing pertinent information with colleagues. Teachers are highly skilled in their disciplines and work together to develop common best practices, but differentiation is not consistently developed across all classrooms.

Budgeting, scheduling and staff decisions all reflect the school’s focus on achievement and are driven by data, highlighting areas of strength and need. Staff members collaborate on many levels to analyze data, develop curriculum and design assessments. They also work in teams to assess their effectiveness against student results and revise goals to better scaffold learning.

Close attention is paid to the academic, social and emotional development of every student and strong supports are in place to enable effective learning. For example, a majority of staff and a good number of students, trained in peer mediation and conflict resolution, work together to diffuse issues and open lines of communication, when necessary. Students feel respected and are appreciative of the efforts made by staff to assist them, academically, socially and personally. The school has established an advisory program with regular one-on-one conferences to ensure that every student has a responsive adult to counsel them. All teachers and staff participate in professional development to strengthen guidance skills in support of the advisory program. Students and parents report that relationships with teachers and staff are uniformly excellent. An attendance committee monitors tardiness and absences, using a protocol of phone calls, parent conferences and home visits to improve compliance. This committee and advisory teachers have been charged with increasing the school’s average from the current level, 85% to 90% next year, a target the principal feels is achievable once the school moves back to its neighborhood site in September.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal is well respected by staff, students and parents. Under his leadership the school has established a rigorous academic and arts program in this first year. Teachers and administrators hold high expectations for students to achieve a Regents diploma and successfully prepare for college.

New teachers are carefully screened for expertise, content knowledge and leadership. They must firmly believe that all students can learn, and be willing to collaborate to

promote learning. Proactively, the principal has hired a communication arts teacher with expertise in reading instruction for next year. He is in classrooms every day to model instruction, observe students and conference with staff. The principal also conducts formal observations with all teachers several times a year to provide individualized support. Teachers report that his strong personal vision and commitment to inquiry-based learning have enabled them to try new methods, grow individually and learn as a team.

The administrative team and the coach from the Institute for Student Achievement provide ongoing professional development. Together they design in-house workshops, which match needs seen in student data. Teachers also attend two separate five-day trainings with staff from other regional schools, partnering with the Institute, to compare progress across campuses and review and revise curriculum and assessment tools. Although teachers meet to assess and evaluate student progress across disciplines, they do not have adequate opportunities for peer mentoring and critique. Partnerships have been established with John Jay College, the Brooklyn Health Initiative, Project Reach and the New School Institute for Urban Education to enhance academic programs and support self-awareness, health and civic responsibility. Effective structures, designed by staff, are in place so that the school runs smoothly and efficiently.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

As the school completes its first academic year, the principal and teachers have plans to retreat for a week in the summer, with advisors from the Institute for Student Achievement, to review all collected data against the school's original proposal. They will analyze strengths and needs of the program to determine real progress in developing and implementing key elements of the proposal and in realizing the school's vision. This will ground development of the first Comprehensive Education Plan, which will guide year two.

Though students progressed this year, planning was not sufficiently grounded in goals related to early baseline data. Rather, informal classroom assessments were used over time from which to plan. Results of a formal assessment in October, developed and scored by the Institute for Student Achievement, were not available to staff until December. A second parallel assessment will be given to students in June, to determine their growth in reading, writing and mathematics over the year. Though these assessments are designated as the school's first year empowerment zone assessments, they are used primarily by the Institute to measure success resulting from their collaboration with schools throughout the Northeast, including this one. The principal is aware that additional interim assessments, strategically scheduled to support effective planning, are necessary, and plans are in place to develop these during the summer planning retreat. Additionally, it is planned for staff to strengthen classroom assessment binders, which are not yet sufficiently developed, to enable more effective goal setting and planning.

Student progress is compared, in classrooms and across the grade, to assist in diagnosing needs, setting new goals, planning effective interventions and developing curriculum to further challenge students. Student progress is also compared to that of other schools which partner with the Institute for Student Achievement. This process is cyclical, with practices and resources realigned to improve student progress with each successive goal-setting phase.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Brooklyn Community High School for Communications, Arts & Media (HS 412)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students* 	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	