

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies**

**Middle-High School 448**

**610 Henry Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11231**

**Principal: Alyce Barr**

**Dates of review: February 24 - 25, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Jean Mackie**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies is a middle-high school with 663 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 41% Black, 41% Hispanic, 14% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 32% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 93.5%.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal and her directors provide dynamic leadership to the school. They have encouraged collaborative participation of teachers such that there is a common sense of purpose in supporting the personal and academic development of the students in the school. The administration has established a comprehensive data set which enables it to scrutinize data from a range of perspectives such that performance and progress of students can be tracked at individual, class, subject and whole school level. It is continuing to refine its analysis to more formally track subgroups as well. Teachers use a range of assessments to inform progress in class although grading policies vary between individuals, leading to inconsistencies in expectations. Nevertheless, students and parents are kept regularly informed of progress to date and they value this feedback. The school is working hard to establish specific and challenging learning targets for all students in every subject. Some good practice is emerging and the school is looking to consolidate this across all classes. Data is used systematically to identify those students in need of additional support and those at risk of underachieving. The school structures, such as the core arrangements for sixth graders and looping in seventh and eighth grade, help to ensure that students are quickly identified and focused support provided.

The broad curriculum provides some good opportunities for students to develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding through the learning expeditions that they undertake during the year. Additional honors programs and a broader range of selectives is helping to meet the needs of higher achievers and engage those students who require further motivation. Teachers, mostly, encourage group work, but are not yet using the data available to them to inform differentiated instruction on a regular basis. The school places a strong emphasis on professional development and provides good opportunities for teacher collaboration and the sharing of practice. Systems to monitor the impact of professional development, however, are not robust enough to ensure that they consistently impact positively on classroom practice. Teachers and parents contribute to the formulation of the school goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The goals, while clearly focused on securing improvements in the school, are not sufficiently quantifiable and lack specific measurable interim goals which would help the school to measure progress at key times during the year. More generally, systems for monitoring the implementation of key policies such as homework and grading, lack rigor. Nevertheless, the school's meeting structures and analysis of data have led to important adjustments to the curriculum and organization which are contributing positively to student learning and growth.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders are passionate about the personal and academic growth of each student and this informs all that they do.
- The school has developed a sophisticated data system which enables it to analyze performance and progress of students over time and inform organizational decisions.
- There is a positive climate within the school, with mutual respect evident between adults and students, who value and respond well to the strong personal and academic guidance that the staff provide.
- The school is creating greater flexibility for students by extending the already broad curriculum and offering additional honors and selective programs.
- The school provides good opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively and participate in action research.
- The school is working well with parents by communicating information about student progress and engaging families collaboratively in supporting student achievement.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the professional development program has the desired impact on improving instructional practices especially with regard to the use of data to inform differentiation, the frequency of accountable talk and academic rigor.
- Ensure that there is greater consistency in implementing key policies such as grading and homework policies.
- Ensure that there are clear and rigorous systems for monitoring the impact of key school initiatives, such as the development of learning targets, on student outcomes.
- Use the extensive data sets to establish measurable interim goals to support the monitoring of progress towards longer term goals.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school has developed a comprehensive electronic data system which enables it to analyze student performance from a range of sources at individual, subject, grade and whole school level. Trends over time and the performance of cohorts as they move through the school are also scrutinized. The system includes contextual information about students, so that patterns between attendance, for example, and progress can be tracked. The inquiry team is now exploring ways to improve the progress rate in math of a targeted group of special education students with good attendance as a result of this work. The school has looked at the relative performance of different subgroups and analyzed the proportion of students graduating to the next grade in terms of ethnicity. It is aware, for example, that Black male students are more likely to fail in grade 9 than other subgroups of students in that grade. This level of information is increasingly being used to inform the work of the faculty.

There are secure systems for providing both students and their families information about performance and progress on a regular basis. Advisors meet with their crew each morning and this daily contact helps to promote regular feedback to students on how well they are doing, any concerns and next steps. Parents also receive regular written reports and additional informal feedback from individual teachers. Teachers use a range of approaches for formative assessment such as student reflections, rubrics, learning logs and portfolios. The grading policies used to assess student performance and progress are often devised individually by teachers, leading to variations in expectations. Interim reporting systems also vary from grade to grade and subject to subject. The school is aware of this and taking positive steps to tighten and align communication and reporting systems.

The administration has used its data to inform some important organizational and scheduling decisions. For example, the school has modified the selective program and introduced honors programs to provide a more rigorous academic experience for higher achieving students as well as greater breadth to capture the interest of all students.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school has focused this year on developing learning targets for all students in all subjects. These have been collated electronically so that they are easily accessible to school leaders and faculty. Students have their reading and study habits goals stuck to

their planners so that crew advisors can check them regularly. The quality of the learning targets varies, with some that lack sufficient specificity and rigor. As a result, students are not always certain about the next steps that they need to take to achieve their goals. School leaders regularly check data at the end of each marking period and have analyzed specific skills weaknesses in, for example, English language arts which has informed generic goals for improvement. This has yet to be translated into specific measurable interim goals, however. Interim data is used well to target individuals in need of additional support, particularly special needs students and those requiring credit recovery programs.

The school has established collaborative systems for developing the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Parents, team leaders and lead teachers have all been part of the process in establishing goals for the school, based on an analysis of a range of quantitative and qualitative data, including the Learning Environment Survey. The goals are broadly appropriate although not all have clearly measurable outcomes in terms of student progress. As a result, evaluation of impact is not as rigorous as it could be.

The school communicates goals with students and families on a regular basis. The variations in approach by staff, however, lead to lack of specificity about some of the goals set and the timeframe in which they are to be achieved. Nevertheless, the school continually reinforces its high expectations of attendance, behavior and academic achievement through a range of both written and verbal communications to families. The emphasis on student personal reflection along with student/teacher dialogue is a positive feature in the school that helps students to engage in the goal setting process and consider their next steps. However, this is yet to have a consistent impact in all classrooms.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school's strong belief in developing well-rounded individuals is reflected by the broad curriculum that it offers through its status as an Expeditionary Learning school. In addition to the core subjects, the school offers a wide range of courses which includes drama, photography, philosophy, and a selection of technology programs. It has taken positive steps to enhance provision for higher achievers through expanding its honors programs. Students particularly enjoy the learning expeditions such as the construction and demolition of mousetrap cars in the sixth grade.

Teachers use assessment and other contextual information to understand their students' needs. This helpfully informs the use of resources, such as leveled texts in class and any additional interventions that students require to support their learning. However, there is a lack of consistency in the way in which teachers use data to inform differentiated instruction in the classroom. There are some examples where students share and challenge each other's ideas in groups but opportunities are missed in other classes for accountable talk. As a result, some higher achievers are not sufficiently extended while other students struggle with key ideas. Learning objectives are not always clear so it is sometimes difficult for students to see how the work is helping them to achieve their own personal learning targets.

The school has made some judicious financial decisions by purchasing text books with a range of reading levels so that they can be more closely matched to the needs of students in each class. Sixth graders are kept in core groups with just one teacher to support the transition from elementary school. This arrangement encourages more in depth understanding of student needs and the support they require to meet learning goals. The Learning Environment Survey reflects the strong levels of trust and respect evident in the school. Adults act as positive role models for the students, who show good levels of respect both to them and their peers. There is a strong sense of mutual support amongst the staff which the students are aware of and value. Most students are eager to learn and do well and many show high levels of self esteem.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Professional development is an important feature within the school, reflected by the priority given to it in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Every teacher is expected to work towards achieving five learning targets including differentiated instruction and modeling the expeditionary learning design principles. These priorities have been drawn from a range of sources such as classroom observations, teacher reflection and student work. The administration is aware of staff development needs at an individual basis but has yet to formalize this into detailed personal development plans. Support is provided both internally and from external consultants. Teachers work collaboratively and often provide mutual support in planning. In this way, teachers new to the school are integrated into its ethos and expectations. The inquiry team meets regularly to evaluate the work being undertaken to support its targeted group of students. The reflective culture promoted within the school also encourages other teachers to work collaboratively, reviewing student outcomes to inform practice and hence student learning. The skills and expertise of teacher groups at grade and departmental level in undertaking this work vary but are developing over time. Intervisitations take place, often initiated by the teachers themselves.

The administration encourages teacher input into important decisions that impact their work. In some instances, however, the implementation of key policies such as homework, grading and behavior are not consistently implemented leading to expectations of work and behavior that vary from teacher to teacher. Teachers receive both formal and informal feedback on their classroom practice which has led to some positive improvements. However, the systems to monitor the overall impact of the professional development program on improving instructional practices are insufficiently rigorous. The close knit community within the school and the varied support services both internally and externally ensure that all students' academic and personal growth are monitored carefully. Guidance counselors, new to the school this year, are helping to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

School leaders regularly scrutinize data, both quantitative and qualitative, to monitor student progress. Any concerns that arise as a result lead to revisions in interventions for students and, where appropriate, letters to parents. The development of learning targets remains a work in progress as teachers strive to embed the process and revise targets in the light of interim data. A progress check in an English language arts class showed a high level of failure which resulted in a review of learning targets and a redesign of the second semester curriculum. Students' achievement improved as a result. The school has a systematic meeting structure which enables different groups of staff to discuss the work of the school, progress with priorities and next steps. An analysis of the middle school English language arts data has led to a realignment of the curriculum to focus on those skills most in need of improvement.

The school has taken appropriate steps to modify organizational structures to meet the needs of students more successfully. In addition to the core arrangements for sixth graders, seventh grade teachers loop with their students into eighth grade, which helps to promote continuity in relationships, reinforcing student/teacher contact and exchange. The school has also broadened its enrichment programs in an endeavor to capture the interest of all students, especially those whose motivation is not always as strong as others.

The goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan are all focused on improving teaching and learning in the school. While there are some quantitative targets included, goals are not yet sufficiently focused on specific measurable improvements in student achievement. As a result, the monitoring and evaluation systems to measure impact of actions taken on student outcomes are not as rigorous as they could be. The school recognizes the need to refine and strengthen systems and practices for monitoring the impact of its work in accelerating students' learning. The drive and commitment of the principal and her team to continually seek improvements in students' personal and academic growth is commendable. There is good capacity to secure further growth.

School name: Brooklyn School of Collaborative Studies	Δ	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				<b>X</b>
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				<b>X</b>
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		<b>X</b>		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.</b>							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X			
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X			
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X			
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				X			
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X					
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>				X			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed