

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability

Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)

SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT

DBN:	21K096
District Name:	District 21
School Name:	Seth Low Intermediate School
School Address:	99 Avenue P, Brooklyn NY 11204
Principal:	Denise Lewinsky
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (year-1) - Comprehensive English Language Arts- All Students; Students with Disabilities, African American Students; English Language Learners; and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Areas of Identification:	Mathematics - African American Students
Dates of On-site Review:	April 3-4, 2012

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

“The mission of IS 96 is to create an environment that fosters responsible creative students who take ownership of their academic achievement. This will be accomplished through high expectations put forth by following the common core learning standards, utilizing differentiated instruction, infusing technology and analyzing data by the uniqueness of the student.

We commit to all students reaching this goal by maintaining a positive learning environment in the classroom and creating an atmosphere where children enjoy and value learning. Through collaboration, communication and evaluation among students, parents and staff we will ensure that all students are on their way to being college and career ready.”

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The school culture encourages cooperation between the staff members. Teachers have frequent scheduled opportunities to work collaboratively and are collegial and engaged during these sessions.
- The school has developed partnerships with external agencies that have supplied desktop computers to families of students in grades 6 and 7 and provided additional counseling services to students and their families.
- The school building is clean and well maintained.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- The school collects a variety of data such as Acuity and New York State English language arts (ELA) and mathematics item skills analysis. However, the review team found little evidence that these resources are being systematically analyzed for schoolwide, grade-level academy, and subgroup trends in order to inform classroom instruction in ELA, English as a second language (ESL), and mathematics.
- The Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) I-II information and disaggregated New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) results by skills and levels were available. However, the review team found that this data is not always used to place students in appropriate instructional ESL settings according to their proficiency levels; thus, some students are not receiving the support and level of instruction necessary to ensure they master the required skills.
- A number of initiatives to improve student achievement, including academies, P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) alignment and technology-based programs, are being implemented. However, there is no evidence that data is being systematically gathered and analyzed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of these new initiatives and make adjustments, as needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should conduct a data analysis at set intervals during the school year; the results should be used to evaluate the efficacy and impact of all programmatic and instructional decisions. School leaders should use the data gathered to assess the performance and progress of each academy and student subgroup. Data should be reviewed longitudinally, across cohorts, to determine the impact of services and the effectiveness of new initiatives.
- School leaders should ensure that students are placed in instructional ESL settings according to their proficiency levels based on a detailed review and analysis of all NYSESLAT data and AMO information.
- School leaders should identify specific formative, interim, and summative data items that provide evidence of the impact and effectiveness of each instructional initiative, together with a timeline for when and how that data will be collected and analyzed. In addition, school leaders should determine and define measurable criteria to decide if each instructional initiative should continue unmodified, if changes are needed, or if the initiative should be discontinued.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- The school leadership indicated to the review team that the school has recently introduced computer-based programs, such as “Achieve 3000” and “i-Learn.” Grade 6 classrooms each have two computers, and the school has one computer lab and six laptop carts. However, classroom observations conducted by the review team, a review of student work samples, and discussion with students found that the consistent use of computers is not evident as an integral part of classroom instruction in many classrooms. Therefore, many students are not systematically developing technology-based key learning skills to support their future learning.
- As of January 2012, the school began participation in the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI), a reading initiative through the New York City Department of Education. The school has added a full-time reading teacher to enable smaller group instruction for those students identified at-risk. However, interviews and the document review conducted by the review team found that the school does not have a comprehensive reading program that supports all students, including students in need of additional support. Students’ reading levels are not consistently aligned to the available reading materials and are not routinely calibrated to an appropriate level of difficulty. Therefore, not all students are receiving the targeted support they need to improve in reading, based on consistently aligned reading levels.
- In most of the classes observed by the review team, lessons were teacher directed and whole class instruction was the primary method of delivery. Although students were grouped in many classrooms, most students worked on the group activities independently. Students also had limited opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs or talk with different groups of students regarding the task at hand.
- Some lesson plans reviewed by the review team indicated designated timeframes for activities to take place. In many classrooms observed, the review team found that teachers used a “Do Now” to open the lesson, but often this task took more than the allotted time, resulting in limited time for other planned activities. This also limited effective lesson closure, with most lessons ending when the bell rang without a review or summary of the learning achieved or a teacher check for understanding.
- Some lesson plans reviewed by the review team included provisions for differentiation, such as sharing of verbal and audio resources. Implementation of effective differentiation, however, was not observed by the review team in most classrooms. Most students were engaged in the same activity using the same instructional materials. As a result, students were not being sufficiently challenged at their appropriate levels.
- Classroom observations conducted by the review team found that teachers gave auditory directions to students concerning the task assigned. In many cases, learning strategies such as teacher modeling, scaffolding, “chunking,” and visuals were not used to support a variety of student learning styles.
- In most classroom observations conducted by the review team, teachers asked questions that were primarily low-level recall and identification questions that required one word answers from students. The review team found teachers asked very few critical thinking, analytic or evaluative questions that resulted in the use of higher order thinking skills by students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should ensure that teachers have the skills and competencies to effectively use technology in instruction, including laptop computers and SMART Boards. Teachers should be surveyed and observed to identify their strengths and areas for improvement in the use of technology. School leaders should provide professional development (PD) on the use of technology in the classroom. School leaders should also work to ensure that strategies learned in these PD sessions are fully implemented in the classroom so that technology is routinely integrated into teaching and learning.
- School leaders should build on the work undertaken through MSQI to implement a reading program across all grade levels and academies to systematically assess students' reading proficiency throughout the school year and for teaching reading to all students. Teachers should use data-based knowledge of students' reading proficiency to ensure that reading materials are at an appropriate instructional level; goals should be established for each student's reading development.
- Teachers should use a wider range of instructional strategies, which include the use of data to group students based on ability levels, interest or learning modality, to promote greater student participation in the learning process. The school leadership should provide additional PD for identified teachers based on school leaders' reviews of lesson plans and classrooms visits.
- School leaders should provide PD, with the support of the literacy coach, on lesson pacing and sequencing of instruction to ensure that learning time is maximized and teachers are able to consistently move through all components of the lesson, including lesson summaries and closure. Teachers should ensure that students start and complete the "Do Now" within the first few minutes of class. Teachers should assess the degree to which students master each day's content. School leaders should regularly monitor the implementation of these practices through formal and informal observations.
- School leaders should regularly monitor teachers' planning and instructional practices in the classroom to check that effective differentiated activities are in place throughout the school. Ongoing PD should be provided for teachers who need additional support in the area of using data to differentiate and inform instruction. Teachers should receive support in identifying pedagogical best practices and scaffolds that meet the individual needs of students.
- Teachers should, with the support of the school leaders, identify instructional strategies that are most effective in engaging and supporting the variety of learning styles of all students, especially English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. These strategies should be identified and shared across the school. School leaders should provide support for teachers through their individual PD plans and monitor and evaluate the impact of the PD to ensure that improvement strategies are incorporated into the teachers' daily practice.
- School leaders should organize systematic PD designed to enable and support teachers to move from teacher-posed questions that require one-word answers or simple recall and comprehension, to questions that require students to support answers by citing text, elaborating on the answers of other students, and summarizing and rephrasing new information. Lesson plans should include

pre-created questions that require critical thinking and discussion. Teachers should also be trained to use wait time and not allow students to opt-out of class discussions. Teachers should avoid calling exclusively on willing student volunteers and develop classroom management systems that ensure that a cross section of students is called upon during the course of each lesson. Teachers should target specific questions to individual students to ensure that higher order thinking questions are used as a method to differentiate based on student need.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- The school leader has recently restructured the school organization through the establishment of an academy structure, small learning communities (SLCs), in an effort to increase enrollment and provide a more personalized community structure. However, the review team found that this reorganization has resulted in many staff members having multiple responsibilities and some duplication. Interviews and document review conducted by the review team revealed that the school has one dedicated data specialist, and there are two other staff members who serve as data specialists as well. The three data specialists do not have clearly delineated roles and responsibilities and do not meet regularly with the school leadership to review emerging trends. Document reviews and interviews conducted by the review team also indicate that split positions are commonly allocated, due to the structure of the academy programs, resulting in overlaps in some positions and the inefficient use of staffing resources. Two staff members program all classes and student schedules manually. The responsibilities of these staff are not clearly delineated, and there are no clear lines of communication with the assistant principals who create the classes within the academies.
- The school is in the process of implementing numerous initiatives, including developing an ELA curriculum, introducing technology-based programs, and introducing the academies. However, a significant number of teachers reported that the number and timing of the implementation of these new initiatives have led to some lack of alignment, uneven implementation, and challenges in evaluating the effectiveness and management of the initiatives. Additionally, measurable benchmarks for progress are not defined in advance, with time frames, to adjust practice during the school year and effectively evaluate the impact of the new initiatives each year.
- Based on interviews and document review, the review team found that school leaders monitor and evaluate teaching and learning through frequent classroom visits, with specific feedback offered to teachers through a formal and informal observation process. However, based on specific achievement data for the subgroups not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), sustained improvements in classroom instruction has not resulted.
- Based on staff interviews and a document review, the review team found evidence that time is scheduled for department planning, collaborative inquiry, and professional learning communities, and teachers are engaged in these meetings. There is also some collaboration between ESL teachers and content area teachers. However, this does not consistently result in effective and aligned differentiated instruction. Additionally, the review team found that a co-teaching model is not being effectively implemented in all classrooms; thus the model is not having the needed impact on student outcomes.

- Interviews and document review by the review team found that the CCLS serve as the school's ELA program. Teachers are developing units and curriculum maps aligned to the CCLS "bundles" provided by the New York City Department of Education. However, the bundles do not provide the full range of curricular components such as lesson plans, assessments, strategies for remediation and enrichment, and subgroup supports. As a result, the school does not have a robust and well resourced ELA program in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should review the roles and responsibilities of all staff in the school to ensure that the resulting school organization removes duplication and reduces the number of staff members with multiple responsibilities. School leaders should also review scheduling and consider the costs, efficiency, and effectiveness of manually programming the building using two staff members as compared to using computer-based software to save time and minimize split classes on the master schedule. The programmer(s) should consider collaborating with programmers from other middle schools within the Network and District to ensure efficiency when creating the master schedule.
- School leaders should establish systematic protocols for what data should be collected, when, and by whom, to enable a thorough evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of each instructional initiative. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the school should determine challenging, but achievable, goals for the next academic year, with interim goals and benchmarks to ensure that the school is making progress towards the annual goals. School leaders should also ensure that all staff understand how each initiative fits together and/or complements others so that the school community can see the road map to improving student achievement. Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, school leaders should review each school function, and process to determine if initiatives, programs, and resource allocations continue to be necessary and effective. Such a review would serve to help eliminate any school improvement efforts that are ineffective.
- School leaders should ensure that informal and formal classroom visits include a time frame for specific, actionable next steps.
- School leaders should monitor and adjust teacher planning times to ensure that there is enough collaboration between all teachers, and especially between ESL teachers and content area teachers, in order to plan effective differentiated instruction for all targeted subgroups. Additionally, school leaders should ensure that whenever two teachers are present in the same classroom, they have jointly planned to meet the needs of all students, shared expertise, and taken joint responsibility for learning and achievement.
- School leaders should review and evaluate each ELA unit of study and modify it to ensure a complete and rigorous program is in place, including lesson plans, assessments, strategies for remediation and enrichment, and subgroup supports. In addition, leaders should ensure that there is strong vertical alignment between each grade level and horizontal alignment across grade levels. School leaders should ensure that each part of the program has sufficient and appropriate student resources.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDINGS:

- For the 2011-12 academic year, school leaders made the decision to remove the 37.5 minute “extended day” time from the regular instructional day and replace that model with a two-day-a-week 50 minute model for small group instruction prior to the start of the regular day. The review team found that this model is used for Academic Intervention Services (AIS). AIS are not part of the students’ regular program day. The school has not conducted an analysis to compare attendance rates for the current extended day program with first period attendance rates from previous years.
- Classroom visits and interviews by the review team found that staff responses to questions regarding classroom climate, behavioral supports, and routines were variable and did not indicate that comprehensive and systematic policies were in place. While student behavior was acceptable in most lessons observed by the review team, and the school’s data showed some reduction in referrals for behavior, school leaders interviewed recognized that the number of incidents needs to be reduced and those incidents that do occur dealt with more effectively.
- Interviews, observations and the data review by the review team found that the school is starting to explore trends and patterns in student attendance data and exploring strategies for improvement. However, school leaders acknowledged that student attendance is not as high as it should be and lateness to school is too high and continues to be a problem.
- The review team found during the document review that many staff members are working under special education extension licenses and are not certified in the content areas in which they teach.
- Interviews and classroom visits conducted by the review team indicate that students are regularly given homework, and there is recognition of the school’s mission to ensure that students are college and career ready. However, the review team found inconsistencies in the quality and amount of homework assigned, expectations for what students should do in homeroom time, and emphasis placed on developing key learning skills. As a result, students are not consistently prepared for high school, college success, and their future careers.
- Interviews and the document review conducted by the review team indicate that the school provides information and workshops and some additional supports for parents. However, the review team found that, overall, parental support in the school remains low. The school has not provided workshops for parents or students on the use of Dedication, which would inform parents about their child’s progress. While the school is found to be responsive to parents’ questions or concerns, parent interviewed by the review team said that they want the faculty to be more proactive and engage with parents to reinforce academic and behavior expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should evaluate the efficacy of the extended day model, with particular reference to student attendance and academic progress. School leaders should ensure that AIS is part of the students’ regular program.

- School leaders should develop a schoolwide protocol for Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Leaders should develop a consistent, prevention-oriented system to organize evidence-based behavior modification practices and improve implementation of those practices, thereby maximizing academic and social behavior outcomes for all students.
- School leaders should ensure that all staff have access to trends and patterns data for attendance and lateness and that staff understand their role in improvement, especially through more engaging and rigorous instruction. Leaders and teachers should use the data to identify early indicators of student difficulties before they become set patterns and establish routines for immediately reaching out to families in partnership with external organizations.
- School leaders should review teaching assignments for all faculty members to ensure that all teachers are certified in the subject areas they teach. School leaders should ensure that PD is provided to teachers who do not have expertise in the content areas in which they are teaching.
- School leaders should review and confirm expectations for the quantity and quality of homework, the use of homeroom time, and college and career preparation and readiness for all students. School leaders should monitor the implementation of these expectations and evaluate the impact on students' motivation for success and their academic progress as described in the school's mission statement.
- The school leader should work with the parent coordinator to develop a plan to improve parental involvement, including a range of communication strategies that invite teachers to engage with parents. The school leader should visit schools where effective strategies are in place that promote parent participation and work with staff to implement similar strategies in the school.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- Interviews and document review by the review team show that the school conducts a needs assessment for PD based on each teacher's interests, self-reflection on their standing within the Danielson framework, and school leaders' classroom observations. This needs assessment is used to develop individual PD plans for each teacher, as well as an overview for schoolwide PD. However, the review team found during discussions with teachers that PD is sporadic rather than cumulative and lacks follow-up through systematic evaluation and refinement.
- Interviews and the document review conducted by the review team found that teachers have received PD on various topics, including the Danielson framework, Beachscape, Dedication, i-Learn Writing Matters, CCLS and curriculum maps. However, only generic PD has been provided on these topics. It was unclear how the PD provided would address the specific needs of student subgroups, including students with disabilities, ELLs, and Hispanic and Black students.
- Interviews conducted by the review team found that teachers who express an interest in a particular development or initiative, and who school leaders believe have the skills to turnkey with their colleagues, receive and deliver PD to others. While this results in a positive climate and

ownership by those interested teachers, it does not ensure that best practices are understood, developed, and enacted by colleagues on a schoolwide basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should ensure that teachers understand their individual and collective road map for pedagogical improvement and how each piece of PD systematically supports this. School leaders should develop a cycle of monitoring and refinement and further PD that is designed to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills over a set period of time. Goals for a teacher's individual PD plan should incorporate needs as well as the areas for improvement observed by the school leaders that will advance the instruction.
- School leaders should ensure that each PD activity results in the expected impact on the academic achievement of each student subgroup and that school leaders have a system in place to monitor the subsequent impact of PD in all classrooms.
- School leaders should ensure that all school leaders share a consensus about what constitutes high quality learning and that this is reflected in strategic PD planning and implementation. This will help to ensure that teachers who are used as exemplars demonstrate consistent best practices for their colleagues to emulate. School leaders should ensure that conversations with teachers concerning their self-reflection are accurate and that their PD needs focus on the most significant priorities, with clear timelines and expectations for growth. PD activities should be modified to address the specific needs of individual teachers.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- Interviews by the review team found that the school has increased the quality, quantity, and accessibility of high interest and hands on instructional resources that are matched to the needs of students. Classroom observations, however, found that there remains a need to further extend the number and range of such resource materials.
- The review team visited a classroom in the school that has been designated as the science laboratory, consisting of desks and kits. There is no sink or eye wash station in the room. This current science lab configuration limits students' capacity to conduct experiments and enhance the science curriculum to support the Health and Sports Management Academy as well as Regents level coursework and preparation.
- There is a library/multimedia center and a full-time librarian. However, students indicated to the review team that library use is limited and that the library collection has minimal resources available for them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School leaders should ensure that all students and teachers have greater access to texts and other resources that interest and engage students at an appropriate level of academic challenge, including native language texts and resources that support the ESL curriculum and students with disabilities.
- School leaders should seek to acquire additional funding and/or partnerships to develop a fully functioning science laboratory that supports a greater variety of hands-on experiences for students and advanced science instruction.
- School leaders should ensure that the library has open access periods before, during, and after school to meet the needs of all students to further develop independence and promote academic and research skills as well as good study habits. School leaders should seek the support of the Network in identifying grants and supplemental funding to evaluate and upgrade the collection of resources to better support the learning needs of all students. Materials that are grade-specific as well as high interest with easy readability and more challenging literature should all be available to meet the needs of all students. School leaders should oversee and monitor library resources through observations and walkthroughs.

PART 4: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in the report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning, and the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan for the school year 2012-13. The school should also continue its efforts in the implementation of the following Regents Reform Agenda initiatives: P-12 Common Core Learning Standards, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.