

MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

**1186 Carroll Street
New York, 11225**

Principal: Dr. M Wiltshire

Dates of review: 24 – 26th May 2006

**Reviewer: Martyn Groucutt
Cambridge Education**

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PART1: The School Context.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This small high school has shown remarkable progress since 2001 when the current principal was appointed. In 2005 the graduation rate was 84%. In 2001 around a third of graduates were admitted to college for full courses and this has now increased to 99%. It has 150 students following dual enrolment and College Now courses and there are currently 12 Advanced Placement classes. There is an unashamed stress on supporting students to be academically successful and the school lives up to its motto, "Where excellence is the norm".

The school is now able to select its own students, and for next academic year there are over 600 applications for 70 places. Selection is by entrance test. In addition, both students and their parents and guardians are interviewed because the school sees working with parents/guardians, in true partnership, as of prime importance in supporting the academic development of each student. This is the first year of the school's planned expansion to teach grades 6 – 12. There are currently students in grade 6, then 9 – 12.

The school is involved in a dual enrolment program with Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York. The institutions are adjacent to one another making liaison straightforward. The joint venture allows school students to accumulate college credits at the same time as earning credits towards high school graduation requirements. The program requires the school to provide a challenging differentiated curriculum for the most gifted students. In addition, the school provides supportive schedules for students with learning difficulties which enables them to keep up with basic skills. The school recognizes the importance of a balanced curriculum and while it fosters excellence in math, science and technology (since these are areas where the minorities are under-represented), it puts due emphasis on the liberal arts.

Students come to the school from all five boroughs of the city, although the great majority live in the local community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Students are encouraged to have high aspirations and most respond well to the expectations made of them. At the end of the last academic year the school received an award in recognition for its achievement as a high achieving/gap closing school. It was commended for "...leading New York forward to accomplish the dual goal of increasing student achievement, while closing the gap in student performance".

PART 2: OVERVIEW.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- There is clear vision and excellent leadership from the principal.
- The quality of teaching and the degree of collaborative planning within and between departments is effective.
- The vast majority of students share the school's vision.
- Data is used highly effectively to drive programs and track student progress.
- The autonomy of the school is used to very good effect to create a curriculum that meets its specific goals.
- The counseling team provides excellent support to students.
- The support given to students in preparation for moving on to college is excellent; the dual enrolment program is an outstanding feature.
- There is rigor in the curriculum, matched by high challenge and expectation for all students.

WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- The data, used to such good effect by the administration, could be further refined to inform the planning and teaching of individual lessons more effectively.
- There should be more consistency in the quality of teaching so that all lessons come up to the school's expectations.
- Computers and computer technology could be used more effectively as a tool for teaching and learning throughout the school.
- Efforts could be made to raise levels of attendance, which have fallen from a previously excellent level.
- The quality of displays in classrooms could all be raised to the quality of the best.
- More effort could be made to address under achievement of the school's African-American boys.

PART 3: MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school with very high aspirations for its students. Standards of achievement have risen quickly since the arrival of the current principal, who has a clear and dynamic vision for school improvement. Staff and a large percentage of students share the principal's vision. They are committed to getting graduates to achieve their very best, especially in math, science and technology which are areas where minority groups are under-represented in contemporary American economy.

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

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

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

The school uses a variety of data to gain a clear view of what each student knows, understands and is able to do. A baseline assessment is carried out for all pre-6th grade students who attend summer school (the Bridge Course) prior to starting at the school. Each student's academic performance is regularly monitored throughout their time at the school.

The school makes good use of external data, such as cohort data. However, it also creates its own valuable information which enables it to track students' progress effectively. Rubrics are used to good effect by teachers and students. Indeed, students are actively involved in evaluating their own performance because they are able to work out their own level of achievement and what they need to do to improve.

Nevertheless, improvement could be made in the use of data in relation to lesson planning. This is in part due to delays currently experienced by all high schools in getting timely data from the department of education. Once addressed teachers will have the opportunity to refine their use of data and make comparisons between the performances of different populations of students. For example, the school is aware that the performance of its African-American boys is not as good as it should be and analysis of cause and effect would be helped if the comparative performance figures were available earlier in the school year.

Comparison of performance against similar schools is not seen as particularly helpful by the school because its results are usually far better. However, great care is taken to compare the performance of different subjects and grades to ensure that standards are equally high and students are doing as well as they can.

Quality Statement 2: 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 well developed.

The school's status as a part of the Autonomy Zone of schools has enabled it to provide opportunities for students to attend a summer school prior to their enrolment. The outcomes of baseline assessments carried out during the summer school are used well by teachers to start planning an appropriate curriculum based on the specific needs of students. Teachers stay with the same class of students throughout their first year. This level of stability is used effectively, enabling teachers to know their students well and monitor performance robustly.

The school has elected to have six marking periods during the year. This is above the basic requirement. The time spent on additional testing is worthwhile and beneficial to students because the results are analyzed carefully and robustly to track individual student progress, identify specific strengths or weaknesses in student performance and group them according to academic need. The school's willingness to adopt a creative and flexible approach to scheduling ensures that the needs of weaker students are met and allows more gifted students the opportunity to undertake work at a level normally expected of rather older students. Furthermore, the school's flexible attitude towards the use of time is clearly reflected in the overall design of the curriculum. For example, it is the norm to reduce the time taken by students to complete the Math A curriculum through use of Saturday school. Students then take the Regents exam early so that they can progress to, and take the exam in, Math B. This is no easy feat given that many students enter the school performing below grade expectation.

There is a great clarity in the way in which the school conveys its high expectations to parents and students. Parents are expected to actively engage with the school in the process of educating their child and it is assumed that parents will fulfill their obligations. There is a clear vision based on the pursuit of academic success in which all staff, students and parents are expected to share – and most do so willingly. During the evaluation it was a delight to attend the presentations made to 'students of the month'. This celebration of achievement involved all departments and grades. Parents were invited and a special breakfast was enjoyed by all to mark the success of these committed young people.

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

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

The school's program maximizes the use of the time available for teaching. Students are motivated well to aim for the highest possible levels of academic achievement of which they are capable; whatever that might be. As a result the basic curriculum for each student comprises:

- 4 years of math and science, with physics, chemistry and biology taught as discrete subjects.
- 3 years of modern foreign language, including Mandarin and
- 2 years of information technology.

The most able students can take the Math A Regents, for example, by the end of grade 9 and then move to more advanced work. The school's commitment to offering a range of challenging courses is reflected in the fact that during the time the principal has been in post the number of Advanced Placement courses has gone from zero to 12. Similarly, the most able students now have the opportunity to start undergraduate work in the upper grades. Students involved in the Dual Enrolment program are appreciative of the chance to participate in this program. At the other end of the academic spectrum, great care is taken to support students at risk. Counselors support every student in the school and develop detailed knowledge of individual needs through looping with the students as they move through the school. Parents of students at risk are contacted and encouraged to work with the school to support their children. An analysis of need is undertaken by the principal, and any necessary alterations are made to the student's schedule to ensure that individual needs are met. Furthermore, additional support is provided when after school and on Saturday mornings in the fall and spring. Students are appreciative of the fact that all teachers are willing to give 1-on-1 support to them if there is something they do not understand.

The school has rightly identified the need to address two significant areas for development. The first is the falling level of attendance which is down around 4% over the last year. There is evidence to indicate that the decline is due in part to the absence of an outreach worker to work with families in difficulties.

The second is the need to ensure that computers and computer technology are used effectively and efficiently to support teaching and learning. Although some teachers are using lap-top computers to good effect in lessons not all do so. As a result this limits the school in its ability to help students acquire appropriate levels of knowledge and skill which will contribute to their future economic well-being.

The quality of instructional activity does not always meet the high expectations of the school. For example, the pace and rigor is not always sufficiently challenging to motivate students, and some lessons do not contain an appropriate period of time for students and teachers to reflect on what has been learned. Although the quality of teaching is good overall, not all come up to the standards set by the best and as a result the school's performance could be even better still.

Quality Statement 4: 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 overall well developed.

The principal seeks to ensure that he appoints high quality teachers and around 90% of the current staff have been appointed since he took up post five years ago. The majority of teachers have Master's degrees and there is an expectation that all should be able to teach the AP courses so that the range of courses can expand. Very good professional development is provided to support staff in meeting the school's high expectations in relation to continuous quality improvement. Resources have been used wisely to employ

consultants to support teaching in subjects where results are not as high as they should be.

The principal has shown that he is able to take firm action when recruiting and retaining staff, such as in music. Despite the commitment to the arts, results in this subject were not up to the expected standard and as a result new appointments to rectify shortcomings will be made shortly.

The majority of teachers are fully committed to the goals of the schools, which helps to sustain the vibrant atmosphere. One teacher described her job as “the best in the world”. Staff keeps their subject knowledge and expertise up to date in a variety of ways, including attendance at seminars and conferences. Other innovative measures are employed to maintain high levels of expertise, for instance Mandarin is one of the foreign languages being taught at the school and the principal is investigating the possibilities of developing links for a student summer program linking with a Chinese school or university.

Teachers are accountable for the results obtained by their students. Regular meetings take place between the principal and individual teachers during which teachers must justify the standards attained by their students. One teacher said that while this might at times be uncomfortable, it was nevertheless challenging and rigorous. The pursuit of excellence is also seen through the focus on teacher’s own self evaluation and rigor of constructive criticism following lesson observations. Student assessment data is used to inform these activities to good effect throughout the year and where necessary this is standardized to ensure equity of judgment.

The principal is admired by the whole community, including students. His clear vision and purpose dominates the school and the whole school community. His capacity to effect change has transformed the school over a period of five years and enabled it to reach the point at which it is now. However, the plans for further changes show that there is no complacency and the school has the capacity to improve even further. The school runs smoothly in a spirit of cooperation and hard work, yet it is a place where people get great reward and fulfillment, no better illustrated than in the fact that for the whole period of the quality review not a single raised voice was heard throughout the building.

An area where instruction might be made more effective is that of classroom layout and appearance. The best classrooms create a real feeling that they are learning environments, with the rooms containing stimulating displays of students work and other materials. Not all rooms are yet at this high standard – especially those used by several teachers, none of whom have a sense of ownership. This need to provide a stimulating environment in all classrooms is something for the school to address.

Quality Statement 5: 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 well developed.

Reference has already been made to some of the procedures that are firmly in place for monitoring the performance of individual students and ensuring the accountability of teachers. The support given to individual students who either request help or have been identified by the school, ranges from informal support provided willingly by teachers in their own time, to more formal mechanisms such as the development of special programs or through additional tuition in after school hours. Guidance counselors also play a full

role in supporting students and parents are actively involved in meeting their children's needs.

The fact that teachers are held accountable for the results of their students is symptomatic of the attitudes of the school. The good quality of teaching and learning is reflected in the fact that, although many students enter at around, or below, grade level there are currently 150 students engaged in credit bearing college courses, and 99% of students go on to full 4 year courses in colleges, including prestigious universities such as Syracuse and Stamford.

Since the monitoring of student progress starts in the summer prior to students entering the school and continues on a regular basis throughout their time at the school the performance and the individual strengths and weaknesses of every individual are known and addressed successfully. There is a clear focus on outcomes and achievement, which is reflected in the fact that the Regents courses are the lowest level courses available to students. Care is taken to ensure that each student's full potential can be achieved. This involves the use of rubrics by both teachers and students which is a significant factor in identifying current levels of achievement and the "next steps" needed to raise attainment to the next level.

Other key observations

This is a school which demands, and gets, the best, both from its students and its teachers. The levels of commitment are remarkable and the improvement in standards of achievement over the last five years is a testimony to the principal's single-minded determination to create a school where excellence is the norm, and to the rest of the administration and teaching staff, who commit themselves to sharing the goals and aspirations.

DRAFT

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PART 4: EVALUATION CRITERIA GRADE SUMMARY

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Final Evaluation	0	✓	+
Overall Quality of the school			+
Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	0	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 			+
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>		✓	
<p>1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>		✓	
Quality Statement 2: 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.	0	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>			+
<p>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 warranting attention.</p>			+
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			+
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>			+
<p>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</p>			+

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	0	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.			+
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.			+
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			+
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			+
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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.			+
3.6 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.			+
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		✓	
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.			+
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			+

Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
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.			+
4.2 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.			+
4.3 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			+
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			+
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			+
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			+

Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 reaching stated goals.			+
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.			+
5.3 Information generated by interim 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.			+
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.			+