



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Paul Robeson High School  
High School 625**

**150 Albany Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11213**

**Principal: Ira Weston**

**Dates of review: September 25 – 27, 2006  
Reviewers: Trevor Yates and Marilyn Lehmann**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Paul Robeson High School has over 1570 students in grades 9 through 12, with over 88% Black, 10% Hispanic, 2 % Asian and 2% White students.

In 2005 the school's attendance was 75.4%, compared to similar schools' average of 79.4%; it has a graduation rate of 56.1% and a 7 year graduation rate of 77.1%.

There is also a LYFE center, a daycare center to accommodate students who have children.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has developed a strong vision for the school, which is shared by staff and students.
- The strong culture in Paul Robeson promotes high student commitment to the school and helps to create a secure and safe environment.
- There are excellent staff-student relationships.
- Staff collaboration and professional development are at the heart of the school's culture; the staff shows a strong and demonstrable commitment to improvement.
- The school has a very effective advocacy program in place to support all grade 9 and holdover students, and has significant success in enhancing the skills and achievements of many students who enter the school with relatively low levels of attainment.
- Students benefit from a wide range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular clubs and activities.
- The principal has developed excellent networks, which have enabled the school to benefit from extra resources to promote learning.
- Students, particularly in business and technology, make good use of the school's information technology facilities to undertake research and to enhance their learning.
- The school engages with the local community, and makes good use of community-based organizations and outside agencies. It also provides a good range of events and activities for parents, including the Saturday Parent Academy.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop the monitoring and review of action plans against clear and specific criteria, to support the evaluation of the priorities in the Comprehensive Education Plan.
- Implement rigorous professional development strategies for teachers to raise achievement.
- Develop strategies to address the changing nature of the enrollment and engage the less motivated students.
- Enhance teachers' understanding of the use of assessment data to inform classroom practice and differentiate instruction to enable the school to meet the diverse needs of all students.
- Build on the existing policies and procedures to reduce tardiness and enhance attendance.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school, with some well-developed features.**

The principal has a very good knowledge and understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. The school creates a nurturing environment where the students, many of whom face significant challenges in their personal lives, can learn effectively. The school cares well for staff and students.

The school provides a wide range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The parent coordinator is extremely well respected and valued by staff and parents. Parents indicate that the staff know the students, and that the school provides a wide range of good quality activities for its students, particularly in the areas of business and finance. However, they also express some concerns about the changing nature of the enrollment, and the need for the school to adopt more effective strategies for engaging the less well-motivated students.

### 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 principal makes good use of the available data to compare progress in all subjects against previous years and to track the progress and performance of individual students by subject and across grade levels. The cabinet reviews this information and regularly compares the performance of students both across faculties and by teacher, particularly at the end of the six-week marking periods. As a result of these processes the school's leadership can focus their support where it is most effective.

Faculty members meet on a regular basis to discuss the progress of individual students and grade data is supplemented by the use of rubrics to assess students' performance across all subject areas. In the majority of classrooms these rubrics are clearly displayed alongside student's marked homework and/or coursework. Where this is the case the students are beginning to understand what they have to do to improve. However, teachers do not make enough use of the available data to monitor the progress of all students over time against key skills and concepts. As a result, in some classes there is a lack of clarity about what each student knows and can achieve. Where this is the case the progress students make is reduced.

The school has set a target of 80% for mastery in class work, and all staff and students are aware that the chances of students passing the Regents examinations are significantly reduced unless students reach this level. The target has helped to reinforce the students' understanding of what they need to do to achieve success.

Comparisons of performance with similar schools are available to the school, but because the range of schools included in the similar schools category is very wide the school is not at present placing emphasis on this information to guide future developments.

**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 with some well-developed features.**

The school’s culture is student-centered. The staff have a strong commitment to the total well-being of students. Students, staff and parents refer positively to the caring atmosphere in the school. The students are particularly appreciative of the extent to which they are personally known and understood by their teachers.

Collaborative planning, which takes place on a daily basis, is a clear strength of the school. The use of ‘level-alike logs’ is designed to promote and enhance consistency of practice amongst all faculty members. Members of the cabinet visit at least four classes every day; all nine members of the cabinet review the work of each faculty twice a year. This gives the cabinet a very clear and in-depth picture of what is happening in the school.

The school is aware that it has a very large ‘tail’ of “at-promise students” and it has established clear systems and procedures to inform parents and caregivers of the progress of each student. Teachers complete support sheets for any student who is achieving at or below a 60 mark at the end of the second and third marking periods. Informative letters are sent home to all parents at the end of each marking period prior to school opening. The summary of all students at risk is circulated to all counselors and failure rates are shared with all staff, with the pass rates for every class published by grade and teacher’s name. This good quality information is helping to raise expectations amongst staff, students and parents.

The information is feeding into the school’s detailed Comprehensive Education Plan, which in turn is supported by good action plans. The higher expectations that are conveyed to all students are beginning to get the message across that all students can complete school and graduate, even if it takes up to seven years. At present the four-year graduation rate is 56.1% and the seven-year rate is 77.1%. This indicates that the strategies are not yet having sufficient impact on day-to-day instructional practice or accelerating each student’s learning fast enough. The school lacks sufficiently demanding objectively measurable goals with appropriate timeframes. Teachers need these if they are to bring about further improvement of instructional practice and student learning.

**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 proficient with some well-developed aspects.**

The principal is very aware that the school needs to achieve greater consistency in the quality of instruction and learning, and is accomplishing this by setting the tone of the school, providing models and exemplars of good practice, and directing teaching. The leadership has clear plans for the future; from 2007 it is intended to establish four academies within Paul Robeson: New Media Technology; Entrepreneurship; Finance and Information Technology. The last two of these will be screened programs for students performing at level 2 or above.

One of the most successful developments to improve student achievement has been the way in which the school has modified its scheduling. It has introduced '4 x 4' blocks in grade 9 for students performing below grade level. In the fall and spring students have double blocks of English and mathematics, supplemented in one term by two blocks of science and computers and in the other term by two blocks of social studies and physical education. This has reduced the number of subjects that students study at any one time, reduced the homework burden and enabled staff to develop more effective working practices with students. At the same time, the school has also introduced a teacher advocate program for all grade 9 students. Each advocate supports on average 12 students. The advocates see each student on a daily basis to monitor attendance and also hold a weekly group meeting. The impact of these changes has been an almost four-fold decrease in the number of grade 9 holdover students.

The school is beginning to develop a positive learning culture amongst the staff. It has established a number of staff groups, including, for instance, the collaborative teaching team, which have a clear focus on the quality of instruction. There are frequent class visits to observe and support teaching. As a result of the cabinet's visits they produce weekly reports. Their findings at the start of the term identified a number of issues; for example, not every class visited had the 'Essential Question and Understanding Goals' in place. Staff received written feedback on these aspects and this brought about better consistency in the practice throughout the school. However, some aspects are proving harder to change, for instance, senior staff are aware that the curriculum is not student-centered enough and they have prioritized this as an aim for all classrooms.

The behavior of students is excellent. There is little or no unacceptable or challenging behavior and where the occasional student is not engaged with the learning process, they do not disrupt the education and learning of others.

Attendance and tardiness are areas of concern for the school. For example, during the review daily attendance was at or below 70%, although during periods 1 and 2 on Tuesday attendance in many classes was noticeably below this level, as low as 42%, although by the end of the period 2 it had reached 66%. The school is acutely aware of the problem and has implemented a wide range of strategies in order to enhance attendance and reduce tardiness. These include first day contact with parents, a weekly attendance team meeting where individuals and groups of students are discussed, and specific staff taking responsibility for individual students. In spite of these strategies, attendance and tardiness are still running at unacceptably high levels and are consequently having a detrimental effect on the learning and attainment of very many students.

**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 with some well-developed features.**

The school is well led by the principal who is strongly supported by a very effective cabinet. They have a clear vision for how the school needs to develop. The cabinet makes effective use of data generated in the school to compare the outcomes within and across classrooms. This is reinforced by the frequent classroom visits which strengthen the insights gained from the data. For example, a recent report on class visits identified student-centered instruction as the focus for immediate action. Most teachers do not ask questions that challenge the students sufficiently; they are more focused on covering the lesson's content. There is also limited evidence of work in one subject reinforcing work in others, but good practice was observed in English and social studies where the faculties

have aligned the curriculum of the two subjects. The leadership's processes are used to set priorities and to guide the professional development program for teachers and they are beginning to have a positive impact on improving learning.

There are a number of good opportunities during each school week for teachers to work collaboratively and for inter-class and inter-school visitations to take place. Staff make good use of their time to discuss the progress of individual students and to plan the work of the faculty, although opportunities to develop the use of data to encourage teachers to refine the impact of their teaching are missed.

The principal has invested a considerable amount of Title I funding to extend the range of professional development. For example, recently over 20 staff attended a Saturday morning professional development session, and a further 10 staff attended an after school session.

The school has an impressive array of partnerships and collaborations with community-based organizations, outside agencies and local businesses. Parents speak highly of the excellent way in which the school ensures that they are made aware of the range of services available to them. The principal has also developed a very wide network of contacts, including for example the Citibank, all of which provide considerable extra resources which the school utilizes to enhance student learning. These are most noticeable in the range and use of information technology across the school, but particularly in business and technology. These facilities are well used by parents and members of the local community who attend the Saturday Parent Academy.

**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.**

The principal has an effective and thoughtful style of leadership which is mirrored by the cabinet. Together they are able to reflect on all aspects of the school's work and engage in a meaningful evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's policies and procedures. This is bringing about change and improvement. For example, the school has adopted 'Teaching for Understanding' as a strategy for promoting consistent methods across all classrooms and the teachers' use of collaborative planning has now become well-developed. However, the analysis as to how teaching impacts on student learning is at an early stage of development and consequently is not effective. Teachers do not yet make effective use of data to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of the students. At present, the continuity and progression of programs both within an individual subject and across the whole school are erratic; the school lacks a coherent curriculum map, and there is still work to do to encourage consistency of expectations amongst all teachers.

The school has a well-developed guidance and advisory service. Individual students' performance is well documented, and there is a strong understanding within the school of where students are succeeding or in need of additional support. The parents are very supportive of these services, but also feel that although both the college advisor and parent coordinator are very good, the amount of work needed at particular times of the year is too much for them to cover effectively.

The school is well placed to involve all staff in the creation of further plans for improvement. The leadership understand the need to identify success criteria and interim goals against which the progress of initiatives may be measured, but this process is not yet central to all developments.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Paul Robeson High School (HS 625)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	