



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Forest Hills High School

High School 440

**67 – 01 110th Street
Queens
NY 11375**

Principal: Stephen J Frey

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Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Forest Hills High School is a well-established high school which provides for students from 9th to 12th grades. There are just over 3,800 students. As this is significantly over capacity the school has adapted its entry and dismissal times to ease student movement and ensure safety through the day. There are currently 144 special education students, some 4% of the total, and 320 English language learners (8%). Numbers have been increasing slightly over time. Students come to the school from across New York City and represent a diverse population. Approximately 38% of the students are White, 11% are Black and 23% are Asian and 27% are Hispanics. A very small proportion of the students are from other ethnic groups. The school is not eligible for Title 1 funding.

There is a very good range of community involvement, which has been planned specifically to enhance the learning and graduation opportunities available to students. Alongside medicine, law and business, music and drama are particularly well promoted through school and community based programs.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has successfully built a highly committed senior team who share his vision of high expectations for student achievement.
- The curriculum is comprehensive, stimulating and enriched, and so promotes student engagement and increases motivation.
- Adaptations to the curriculum have been well planned and have had a positive impact on student learning.
- The best instruction fully engages students and challenges their thinking through well-planned discussion and challenging questioning by teachers.
- Even though the school is large, students move between lessons in a mature and considerate way, under the careful supervision of teaching and supervisory staff.
- Students feel valued and trust adults fully so that they are able to seek help with academic or personal issues.
- Relationships in the school are very good.
- Students throughout the school demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide teachers with data about student achievement at the start of and throughout the year so that lessons can be planned in relation to the needs of all students, and teachers are made accountable for student outcomes.
- Increase teachers' confidence in using their knowledge of student achievement when assessing the progress made between marking periods by groups and individuals and using this information consistently to modify their planned instruction.
- Identify, agree and implement a schedule of those features which characterize the best instruction and ensure, using professional development, that these are consistently present in all lessons.
- Appoint a senior member of staff to be responsible for leading the development and analysis of student data and evaluating the effectiveness with which teachers use the information.
- Ensure that planning for school improvement is set against an achievable number of priorities that are derived from clear evaluations of effectiveness, and that progress is monitored rigorously to ascertain that the plans are effectively keeping the school on track towards identified goals.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with some important areas of strength and some areas that require significant improvement.

Forest Hills High School provides a good and improving quality of education for its students, which is reflected in the continuing improvements in the achievement of students. Staff in senior positions demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and are led very well by the principal in bringing about improvement for their students. The school has worked hard to establish a good range of information about student achievement which increasingly helps staff to identify where initiatives are successful and where further improvements are required. Students receive good instruction from the majority of their teachers. Work to raise teachers' confidence in making use of data in planning instruction is still at a relatively early stage. The school recognizes that more needs to be done in establishing a shared understanding of features that characterize best practice and, particularly, in using assessment information to inform differentiated instruction.

Students have very positive attitudes to the school and to their learning. This is due, at least in part to the very broad curriculum which has been developed and the good relationships that the students have with staff, whose commitment to them and their education is recognized and celebrated. Their parents know that their children are well cared for and supported. The majority of staff are enthusiastic and work hard to ensure the development of both the school and their students. Led with skill and clear vision by the principal, the school as a whole is determined to continue to improve even further. The early impact of recently introduced initiatives is a strong indicator of its potential for success.

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

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has effective systems for gathering and interpreting data. These are comprehensive and give leaders an appropriate understanding of aspects of students' learning where improvement might be required and where groups have met the challenging expectations that are set. More refined systems are being put in place to build the school's understanding of student achievement and to plan action to secure improvements. These systems have the potential to enable the school to identify needs and respond to them appropriately. Information from assessments is used effectively in comparing students' progress across grades, between subjects and in relation to similar schools. Students who are achieving at too low a level are identified using information from State and Regents examinations, and this helps the school in planning appropriate support. For example, grades achieved at the end of marking periods are analyzed on a 6-weekly cycle in order to identify performance in relation to past trends. In contrast, while groups of English language learners have been established using data that the school has

collated on a spreadsheet, this is relatively new and has yet to be refined in such a way as to illuminate the comparative progress made by students with different home languages.

While leaders in the school make use of an increasingly sophisticated range of data, and are committed to improving this further, they also understand that there is a need to build teachers' understanding of and confidence in using the information. Currently, this is too varied and teachers' ability to modify instruction at a sufficiently early point is limited as a result. Evaluation and monitoring of instruction have demonstrated that there is too great a hiatus at the start of each year while teachers get to know their students' capabilities. Leaders in the school recognize that the provision of attainment profiles for each class and group would go a long way towards addressing this issue.

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 undeveloped.

School leaders demonstrate high expectations of their students' performance which are reflected, for example, in the establishment of a sixty five percent passing rate for students sitting the Regents examinations. A very good start has been made in using data to ensure that this can be achieved. Effective use is made at senior and faculty level of a wide range of assessment information in planning the curriculum and in setting overall goals for students' achievement. The principal and assistant principal are well aware of areas of the school's work in which improvement is required and planning identifies these well. For example, the school recognizes that teachers are not consistently using information about student achievement in planning lessons that fully meet all students' needs, and it has begun to make progress in developing this aspect of its work.

A comprehensive range of assessments is undertaken, and the analysis of these has begun to assist the school in planning more challenging work for its students and in setting higher goals for their achievement. However these systems are new and are not yet applied in setting clear targets which would guide students' work. For example, the school accurately identified that there has been too long a gap between the start of the academic year and the point where teachers feel confident in their knowledge of students. Although a good start has been made in addressing this issue, the school recognizes that more remains to be done in order that targets can be set accurately and tracked through the year. None the less, there is clear evidence of the success of the school's development so far in the improvements that were secured in student achievement at the end of last year.

Parents are kept very well informed about students' achievement. This communication is particularly effective for students who have identified difficulties in their learning. Individual education plans identify the small steps needed to ensure progress. Regular meetings involving teachers and support staff ensure a rapid response to emerging issues, and the outcomes are reported to parents, ensuring their full involvement. The school is working to ensure that these strategies are applied consistently for all students, so that all members of the community are actively involved in securing improvement.

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.

The school has an exceptionally broad curriculum which is designed to maximize the opportunities available for students to learn through areas that reflect their interests and aspirations. The planned development of academies for mathematics and science, law, healthcare and business will complement very well the academies that have already been established in music, drama and public service in providing a very broad range of opportunities for students. The recent move to an annualized curriculum has been planned in part to improve the school's ability to gather, analyze and respond to student data more effectively.

In parallel, the school is placing considerable emphasis on changing the culture of teaching to promote a greater focus upon learning within the curricula rather than upon simply following the requirements of each subject. In this it has achieved much success although leaders recognize that more still remains to be done. Through the school's rapidly developing systems for analyzing data, school leaders have a good understanding of standards reached by students across the school. However, while teachers know their students well, and generally have strong relationships with them, on too many occasions this information is not used at the classroom level in planning differentiated instruction. Together with their own monitoring, and through information gathered, for example, at faculty meetings, the principal and assistant principals have a good understanding of the effectiveness of teaching in promoting learning. The principal has used this information well in making both scheduling and deployment decisions, such as in the recent changes introduced to make better use of college counselor time. In a similar way, professional development has focused more on those aspects of teaching which require improvement.

Student attendance has been consistently above average over the past three years as a result of the very good and successful range of strategies that are in place to ensure them.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has a clear vision of the direction that the school needs to take in its development which is reflected in his selection and deployment of staff. The emphasis that the school is increasingly placing on the use of data has, for example, led to the early formulation of plans to devolve, to a well-qualified member of staff, the responsibility for the collation of data and its development.

Curriculum assistant principals have made a good start in using data to track students' progress in their subjects and to identify areas for development. Strategies for staff development are increasingly focusing on these priorities. However, inconsistencies in the use of comparative data limit the effectiveness of some aspects of this. Monitoring by the principal and the assistant principals is well planned, and is followed by feedback and guidance where necessary. Information from both formal and informal observations of instruction is fed back to staff at different levels through regularly scheduled meetings and is now, increasingly, compared with issues revealed by assessment data. Although the

school has yet to formulate and publish a clear expectation of the characteristics of best practice, demonstration lessons and peer observations have been particularly successful in beginning to establish greater consistency in instruction, particularly in moving towards a more student-centered approach. Through this good range of classroom observation, the school has been effective in raising teachers' expectations of their students, as well as helping teachers to understand the school's expectations of them. These features enable the school to strengthen its understanding of the rate at which improvements, such as in teachers use of differentiation in lessons, are taking place.

Although it is a large and complex organization, procedures are well established and, together with the open door policy so successfully modeled by the principal, enable the school to run smoothly. An exceptional range of partnerships has been, and continues to be, established, which considerably enhances opportunities for learning. Particularly powerful are the links that have been made with medical, legal and business partners who provide direct opportunities for students to experience work in their chosen fields.

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 undeveloped.

The school has worked hard, with success, to develop its curriculum, and to make use of the range of data that it recognizes has the potential to help in planning programs that fully challenge all students. Action has been taken in identifying aspects of instruction that the school wants to see in all lessons, and progress has been made towards achieving consistency in this. The curriculum is stimulating and very well enriched and, as a result, students' achievement has improved, although the school is well aware that more could be done. The principal and assistant principals have gone a long way towards establishing an understanding of the degree to which the school has been successful in meeting its goals, through discussion, accurate monitoring and the review of the impact of professional development. However, the school recognizes that insufficient use is made of the current planning format in establishing an achievable set of targets that the school's is aiming towards each year. Because planning has yet to include clear objectives and structures that will help in their evaluation, it is difficult for the school to identify the progress that it is making towards its goals. Similarly, where modification is necessary because of changing circumstances, it is difficult for the school to recognize this early enough to take appropriate action.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Forest Hills High School (HS440)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

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

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

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

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