



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Far Rockaway High School

High School 465

**8-21 Bay 25th Street
Queens
NY 11691**

Principal: Denise J. Hallett

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Reviewer: Dr. Joan L. Johnston

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Far Rockaway High School is located in the town of Far Rockaway on a peninsula in the southeastern region of Queens. This comprehensive high school enrolls 949 students in grades 9 through 12. Recent statistics for the school indicate that 62% of the students are Black, 33% are Hispanic, 4% are Asian or other ethnicities, and 2% are White. Approximately 17% are special education students and 12% are English language learners.

The school receives Title 1 funding with 73% of the students eligible. This percentage is higher than the 67% average at similar schools and also higher than the City-wide average of 51%. Student attendance, at 76%, is the same as the average at similar schools, but lower than the 83% average at City schools.

Two smaller schools, a middle school and a high school, operate on the same campus and share space in common areas such as the library, gymnasium, and cafeteria. The principal is completing her third year as the school leader.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A focus on small learning communities is enabling the high school to provide a meaningful career-focused education and related support services to students.
- The leadership of the principal, focused on students and their learning, is beginning to transform the culture of the school.
- Youth development services, offered by both the school and a community-based organization, support the social and emotional needs of students.
- A planning process is now in place with specific goals that address identified needs and concerns of the high school related to areas such as academics, attendance, and safety issues.
- The school has begun to use data in more powerful ways to get at root causes of long standing problems and to monitor progress as it occurs.

What the school needs to improve

- Focus academic strategies and management efforts to a greater extent on the needs of the student population the school is currently serving.
- Expand parental support and cooperation to turn around attendance, lateness, and management concerns that have a negative impact on student learning.
- Develop teacher accountability so that it becomes a shared goal embraced by all faculty members.
- Align curriculum and instruction more closely with the New York State Regents mandates.
- Provide professional development that assures consistency of implementation at the classroom level.
- Enhance positive public relations for the high school by regularly highlighting successful programs and events through such means as the community newspaper, school website, and school newsletter.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with some proficient features.

Far Rockaway High School is an imposing structure that sits on an attractive campus with student athletic fields. While plans have been developed to improve the school, there is still room for improvement. A new principal was appointed three years ago who has focused on stabilizing the school, restoring safety, and revitalizing the academic program. Signs of progress are evident as the school culture becomes more student focused.

A promising redesign plan has introduced small learning communities to the campus that are relevant to student career goals. Additional student support services including advisory programs are available. The school is using data to determine root causes for problems and to develop strategies to solve challenges. The school will enlist the cooperation of a larger number of parents to serve as partners in this progress.

A more rigorous academic program is a desired goal across all classrooms. The impact of current professional development efforts is expected to improve curriculum and instruction at the school. As all stakeholders work together on identified goals, they expect to meet the needs of the students and families that the school serves today.

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.

This school effectively gathers data related to important student measures and has been mandated to do so for several years. The school carefully reviews attendance, suspension, and student achievement data including graduation rates, State Regents examination reports, and dropout statistics. Report card data generated after each marking period are also reviewed to assess student progress.

Data meetings are held regularly with the administrative staff. At these sessions the progress of such populations as bilingual students, special education students, English language learners, and students with interrupted formal education are reviewed and assigned to the pupil personnel team if follow-up is warranted. The administrative team has focused this year on gaining a greater understanding of cohort performance and assuring that individual student data is accurate and complete. They are now better able to pinpoint specific problems such as identifying students who have not participated in required testing.

As the school has worked over the past three years to improve student achievement results, they have gained a greater understanding of the root causes for these problems and are now developing and implementing strategies that will lead to greater student success. The school is now using data more consistently to schedule and provide guidance for students. Classroom teachers receive analysis reports and are beginning to

hone in on developing specific skills in areas such as reading comprehension, writing, and test taking skills that they expect will lead to improved performance.

The school receives comparative data reports, but at this time is focused on significant issues within the school and monitoring their own progress in meeting federal and State accountability targets. At the classroom level, teachers recognize the importance of data in driving instruction and supporting individual student learning.

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.

Over the past few years, the school has developed many plans and set many goals to turn the school around. Most of these plans are reactive in nature and have been mandated by City, State, and federal agencies that evaluate school effectiveness. For example, the school redesign plan recommended that small learning communities be established to refocus learning and create a more personal connection to the school.

Other plans target strategies to improve attendance, the graduation rate, student support services, and community outreach. The program for incoming 9th grade students has also been realigned to address skill deficiencies of entering students. Appropriate timelines are in place to achieve identified goals. With so many required building-wide plans to prepare and oversee, the core technology of teaching and learning at the classroom level has not yet improved significantly. There are goals to improve the progress of students in greatest need, but they have not yet been implemented.

The number of periods in the student day has increased, yet students are frequently absent from their first and last period classes. Student attendance at academic support sessions is low. Summer school attendance is also low. High expectations are not consistent across the school. Students report that some teachers encourage students to work hard, but others “just let kids slide.” Parental involvement and cooperation is limited. Outreach efforts have been minimally successful.

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 undeveloped.

The high school implements the mandated Regents curriculum and related State assessments. Students and their parents receive personalized academic progress reports that itemize graduation requirements that still need to be met. The curriculum is not yet fully aligned and curriculum maps are in development.

This year an innovative plan introducing small learning communities has been established to engage students in career-based programs. These include a Health Careers Institute, a Leadership, Law and Social Justice Institute, an Architectural Drawing Institute, and a Business and Computer Institute. These academic communities contribute to a personalized learning experience and are linked with guidance services, field trips,

celebrations and parental involvement activities. The stated goal is that these communities will provide an instructional program that will enable students to meet required standards and move to success at the next level after graduation.

Teachers are shifting from a previous role of delivering instruction to one of facilitating learning and becoming accountable for student outcomes. Professional development does not yet provide all teachers with effective strategies to differentiate instruction within the high school classroom. In some classes, students formed into groups to discuss the same topic and report out to the teacher who remained at the desk. In another class, lights were out in the classroom and students were unfocused. In a technology lab, some students were focused on individual, not teacher-directed goals. The classroom learning environments are not uniformly inviting or conducive to student learning.

A concerted effort has been made to provide additional resources at the classroom level. Teachers, students, and parents all commented on the improvement in this area. Scheduling still presents challenges. Class sizes are still large, and a large number of students are not on grade level, particularly at grades 9 and 10. The school is planning to implement block scheduling next year to address some of these issues.

Students believe that the school responds to their personal and academic needs. Guidance services and an advisory program are available. Community Mediation Services, funded by the United Way, provides additional student support programs throughout the day and after school. Many students take advantage of these programs. Student attendance, lateness and truancy are still major concerns, despite established plans to respond to these issues. Although progress has been made, there is still work to do to fully engage students in their learning.

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.

Along with school restructuring, there has been a significant staffing change with 70% of the teachers new to the school within the past two years. As a result, the principal has had the opportunity to bring in a significant number of new faculty members to refocus the school. She looks for teachers who are excited about their subject, care about students, and who want to become involved with student activities. These new teachers feel supported by the administration and faculty. They have brought in an enthusiastic attitude. Training in the use of data to improve performance takes place during the orientation process.

Professional development has been expanded. Much of this now focuses on realigning the curriculum, improving instructional strategies, and using data, such as item analysis, to drive instruction. Recent efforts have focused on preparing mathematics teachers for the new State curriculum and developing a writing intensive module that prepares students for the rigorous writing required on the English language arts Regents examination.

The principal and assistant principals spend a portion of each day on learning walks or supervising instruction in the classroom. The principal provides immediate corrective feedback when instruction is not rigorous or management issues are evident. Teachers are encouraged to visit other classrooms and that is beginning to happen. Study groups are also beginning to form around instructional strategies.

Greater collaboration is beginning to take place. As a result of professional development, data analysis, planning initiatives, and more effective leadership, teachers report that they are now meeting more to evaluate results and plan in teams. An example of this is the curriculum mapping that is required to realign instruction for the 77 minute block-scheduled classes that will begin next year. Teachers also review midterm assessment data and develop improvement strategies.

Much of the credit for these changes is given to the new principal. She is respected by teachers, parents, students, and her fellow administrators as a tireless worker and change agent for the school. Her door is open to students and faculty. She is providing instructional and organizational leadership in a very challenging environment. She recognizes that growth in student achievement will take time.

At this point in time, management issues take up a significant amount of administrative time. There is a formidable presence of school safety agents and police officers. Daily scanning for weapons take place. Students and their parents believe this is intrusive and is not conducive to student engagement or their willingness to abide by the rules. Many teachers struggle with classroom management and have difficulty getting students to class on time. Others are not supportive of the presence of two additional schools on campus competing for space and future students. The school has worked effectively to provide student support services, such as Community Mediation Services, and to forge outside partnerships, such as those with local nursing homes for internships, that contribute to the overall school program.

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 room to grow with regard to achieving the challenging improvement goals that are required to meet City, State, and federal guidelines. Plans are in place and progress is regularly reviewed by regional officials, school administrators, and teacher leaders. The school has moved forward in its understanding of the role data plays in monitoring student achievement. However, there are weaknesses in monitoring the plans, especially with regard to assuring required student participation in academic intervention services and improvement in attendance. The school recognizes the need for a more effective monitoring and responsive monitoring process.

As a large high school, there have been challenges in implementing plans at the department and classroom levels that have continuous improvement and evaluation processes built-in. Teachers report that information on student achievement does not regularly reach individual classroom teachers throughout the year. Therefore, the same patterns tend to repeat themselves each year.

The school administration recognizes the importance of flexibly revising annual goals and realigning resources throughout the year, but these practices are not yet in evidence.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Far Rockaway High School (HS 465)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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		