



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Richmond Hill High School**

**High School 475**

**89-30 114 Street  
Queens  
NY 11418**

**Principal: Frances DeSanctis**

**Dates of review: May 9 - 11, 2007**

**Reviewer: Frank Knowles**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Richmond Hill is a large high school with over 3600 students enrolled from grade 9 through 12. It is over-utilized and has 22 classrooms in trailers, mostly for freshman classes. The school's students come from very diverse backgrounds. Nearly 47% are Hispanic, 34% come from a wide range of Asian and other backgrounds, 13% are Black and 6% are White. The percentage of English language learners is 15%, slightly higher than the City average and below that for similar schools, and the main home languages spoken are Spanish, Punjabi, Bengali, Hindi and Urdu. Attendance, at 77%, is below the City average but above the average for similar schools. The school does not receive Title 1 funding. Nearly 6% of students follow special education programs, slightly higher than average for the City and for similar schools. However, the proportion of overage students for their grade is 29%, well below the average for similar schools and in line with the City average. The school is divided into four small learning communities, or academies, each with a different vocational theme.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school analyzes data well to gain a very clear view of the performance of individual students as well as by class, by teacher and by grade.
- The Comprehensive Education Plan sets out the school's goals and those for departments, and is used to move the school forward.
- The school has a very thoughtful and creative approach to the curriculum, creating new programs and aligning them well to students' needs using data analysis.
- Instruction engages students and teachers know their students well, taking a real interest in helping students make progress.
- Professional development is a very high priority for the school and is driven by data on students' performance and by the need to prepare for new programs.
- The observation of classroom instruction provides very clear guidance to teachers on what they need to improve, as well as acknowledging positive features in their instruction.
- The principal is highly respected by staff, students and parents and is very effective in involving staff in team working and in leading change.
- The school aligns its own resources and input from support services well to help those students most in need of improvement.
- Attendance is a high priority for the school and staff work hard to improve it.
- The school runs very smoothly despite its size and complexity.

### What the school needs to improve

- Improve the consistency with which teachers align instruction to the identified needs of students and use methods that engage students fully in their learning.
- Deepen the analysis of data, for example by gender, ethnic background and small learning community, to identify and respond to differences in performance between different groups of students.
- Sharpen the Comprehensive Education Plan, setting out whole-school goals more clearly so that they can link more effectively to department plans.
- Provide timeframes and milestones in all plans so that regular reviews can focus on the achievement of interim goals and enable plans to be modified more effectively.
- Intensify efforts to improve results.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The school is moving steadily forward, devising new programs to help maximize the engagement of students in their learning. This is having a significant impact on student outcomes, which have improved recently. The division of the school into four themed small learning communities (communications and visual arts, technology and engineering, health and sports professions, and law and international studies) has the potential to take this process a stage further. The constraints of the building, however, mean that these communities are not as physically separate as the school would like. The curriculum is being shaped by the small learning communities through collaborative working among staff, which is extensive. The school's professional development strategies support teachers very well. Staff are fully involved in activities designed to improve instruction and have already adopted a common lesson structure. Inconsistencies within that structure, however, mean that further work is needed to align instruction more carefully to individual students' needs.

The very effective leadership of the principal has had an impact on the work of the school in a short time, and particularly in driving forward improvements in the curriculum and instruction. As a result, she is highly respected and is able to bring about change where it is needed. Improvements are strongly based on analysis of data. The school's strong focus on the performance of individual students and classes means that those who need special support are well served. Cross-cutting analyses among different groups of students are not yet used to identify areas for change, however. Planning is secure, although the school's ability to make interim evaluations of its progress towards goals is lessened by the absence of timeframes, particularly in department plans. Attendance, although it has received considerable attention, is still too low to support high achievement.

### **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 gathers and analyzes a range of State and City data about students' performance and aggregates this well. Six times a year, the school's own analysis of data from its two marking periods provides a very clear picture of which students, which classes and which teachers are performing well and where exploration is needed to determine the reasons for lower performance. This process also enables the school to gain a view of the progress of English language learners and special education students. The school does not yet use any cross-cutting analysis by gender, ethnic background or, of particular interest to the school, its small learning communities.

The school uses comparative data well, knowing where it stands in relation to other schools (for example knowing that it has 'Beat the Odds' and has fewer overage students than level 1 and 2 students enrolled as freshmen). Its comparisons between classes and

between teachers enable early remedial action to be taken where needed. However, although the school is aware, for example, that Black students do not perform as well as others, it has not yet systematically compared data across different groups to make these sorts of interpretations.

**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.**

The principal, assistant principals and faculty work collaboratively each year to develop the school’s plans, setting clear goals for the school as a whole and for departments. The Comprehensive Education Plan, while detailed in its subject plans, does not link whole-school priorities with department priorities clearly enough. Nevertheless, these plans shape the work of the school and departments and new programs begin or revisions to existing programs take place using the plan’s goals. With 78% of its incoming freshmen only reaching level 1 and 2 in grade 8 tests, the school places great emphasis on designing programs to improve the performance of these students so that they achieve sufficiently well in grades 9 and 10 to be promoted to the next grade.

The school works hard to generate high expectations in students and when contact can be established, their parents. The school regularly uses written materials and class visits by guidance counselors to reinforce this message, although parents are not as involved as they could be. Students’ own goals are strongly focused on passing end of year tests and teachers use their own mark period data to support improvement where it is needed. Teachers are strongly driven by the need to raise the performance of their students, although whole-school goals are not as prominent.

**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 a particularly creative approach to the curriculum. As well as additional classes for those who need to master basic English language arts and mathematics, the school invests in creating new programs where student performance suggests they are needed. For example the Harlem Renaissance course in English language arts is designed to align with students’ interest in African American literature and the Virtual Enterprise course gives high-level business skills to students in grade 12. Assistant principals have a good understanding of what will engage students and they support innovations in departments designed to capture students’ interest. The school also devises programs to support students with specific needs. As well as classes for special education students and English language learners, the school has invested heavily in collaborative team teaching to support special education students.

Teachers are held accountable to their assistant principal and to the principal for their students’ outcomes. The performance of their students is analyzed regularly to indicate which programs are going well and where improvement is needed. There is a strong drive for lessons to contain a short start-up, a mini-lesson containing a workshop activity and a

summary or wrap-up. This strategy is working consistently across the school. However, within that structure, variations in the pace of lessons, the extent of group and paired working and the importance given to the summary mean that students do not always engage fully in learning and make the gains they should. The school has moved a long way in establishing some clear benchmarks for the quality of instruction but these are not consistently met by all teachers. Students value highly instruction that is based on discussion, paired or group work but these are not as fully embedded as they could be in aligning instruction to students needs.

The school's scheduling is particularly complex and accommodates four starts and three ends to the school day and six lunch periods. Budget and staff resources are deployed to match student need. Teachers relate well to students and a mutual respect supports learning, with students enjoying their learning as well as the social side of school. Attendance, however, is a big issue for the school and it is recognized as a high priority for improvement. Many strategies, such as 'first day calls' home by telephone, the involvement of parents and a range of rewards have been tried and have met with some success but are hampered by the movement of some students and their parents within and out of the area. Maintaining the high profile of attendance is a continuing priority.

**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 well developed.**

Professional development is a very strong feature of the school. Assistant principals and the full-time professional developer have driven forward improvements in instruction, particularly in increasing the engagement of students using the workshop model with its paired and group work. Professional development needs are identified through detailed data analysis, directly and indirectly through the needs of new programs. Common planning time and faculty and department study groups are linked to a professional development committee and this arrangement serves to give professional development a very high profile. Specialist methodology for English language learners and for use in collaborative team teaching classes has been covered, alongside the interpretation of assessment data for all teachers. Teachers also share good practice among peers, working extensively in teams within their specialism and across departments, for example English language arts with social studies and special education with academic departments. Very detailed analysis and debate precede decisions about specialist support and as a result this is very well aligned to students' needs.

The observation of instruction is also a strength, with rigorous analysis of lessons, acknowledgement of positives and detailed and practical feedback on what needs to be improved. As well as a regular program for all teachers, observations are linked to analysis of data where the data raises concerns. Much of the rigor in observations stems from the modeling of feedback letters by the principal. The principal is highly respected, by staff and students and by parents who know her. She has a clear agenda for improvement that she promotes very clearly to staff and has been very effective in driving forward changes in the school through involving staff in collaborative work. She also has a very clear vision of the sort of teachers that the school needs and selects new staff securely.

Given its size and complexity in a building built for many fewer students, the school runs very smoothly. Through the good work of the staff involved, dismissals and class changeovers are achieved very efficiently.

**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 staff work collaboratively each year to review the school's progress against its plans and to determine goals for the next year. This works well, both within the cabinet and in departments. The absence of timeframes and milestones in the Comprehensive Education Plan, however, means that the school, again at both cabinet and department levels, is not able to measure progress during the year against interim goals and modify plans where necessary. In departments, however, interim data comparing classes, for example, is used to check progress towards final goals and to make changes to programs and instruction where needed. Overall, the school's annual work on setting, reviewing and revising plans to bring about improvement is secure. Data on students' performance drives the work of departments and the cabinet in improvement planning and in making changes to practice to raise achievement. The use of interim measures of progress, however, is too informal.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Richmond Hill High School (HS475)</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	