

**John Adams High School**

**John Adams High School**

**High School 480**

**101 - 01 Rockaway Boulevard  
Queens  
NY 11417**

**Principal: Grace Zwillenberg**

**Dates of review: May 17 – 19, 2006**

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Cambridge Education**

# JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL

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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school

John Adams is a large high school, currently in receipt of Title 1 funding. There are 3,400 enrolled students. The school is in the process of reorganization into Small Learning Communities. A range of programs, and levels of additional support, is available during and outside normal school hours to support learning, such as the G.E.D. program for older students who are at risk of failing to graduate, or the evening classes and the Saturday Literacy program.

Of the total number of students, around a third are Hispanic and a third African-American. The school has a higher than average number of recent immigrants and the number qualifying for free lunches is higher than in similar schools. The department of Instructional Support Services provides services to 419 students, supported by 23 teachers, 14 para-professionals, 2 speech and language therapists, 4 counselors, a psychologist, a social worker and contracted out specialists in hearing services, family worker and school support. Attendance for the year ending last October was 75.1% and had fallen for three consecutive years, however the school is making great efforts to address this situation and, in the lower grades, attendance is 89% and rising.

In 2005 school utilization stood at 129.6%, reflecting the extent of overcrowding. The school has had to resort to using additional premises, where a large number of ninth graders are taught, some 40 blocks away from the main school.

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## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and her cabinet provide inspirational leadership that is enhancing the quality of education and raising standards.
- Classrooms are positive learning environments in which staff are providing effective teaching that enables students to succeed.
- Care and guidance procedures are well developed, seeking to support every individual student, with clear goals and pathways for achievement.
- Data is used effectively to track individual students and to identify those at most risk, including good monitoring of attendance.
- Effective displays around the corridors, especially the display of student work, create a sense of pride.
- The school forms effective relationships with community groups to support the development of students as well rounded members of their community.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop the use of computer assisted learning to promote individual research or extension work that can be undertaken in a lesson.
- Extend the use of computer-based technology, such as smart boards, alongside a program of teacher support to ensure a good level of competence in its use.
- Seek to address the under-performance of African-American boys.
- Further develop a consistency in expectation, so that students have a clear understanding of what is acceptable at school.
- Continue to develop strategies for improving student attendance.

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## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a well-developed school that uses the data available to provide effective options, courses and support for individual students. The staff is committed to raising standards and is approaching this systematically.**

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

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

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

A great strength of the school is its ability to analyze its data to very good effect. This means that individual students who are at risk of falling behind, or who need additional levels of support, are identified quickly and intervention strategies put into place. Last September the school's cabinet examined the data for every cohort group in the school to seek to ensure that all students' individual needs were being addressed. The school, where results had previously been declining, is now showing improvement, and while the rate of graduation is still low at 49% the procedures now in place and the evidence of academic progress in the lower grades, suggests that the upward trend will be maintained through the school.

Teacher planning takes the progress and attainment of students into account and there is a good appreciation of individual student need. Progress can be measured from entry to the school right through to leaving for all students and action is taken to support those who are not making expected progress, both by subject teachers and by the very good counseling services.

Data is used to support process and procedure in a variety of ways. For example, it provides evidence of rising standards, in preparation for Regents exams, monitoring attendance at school and in maintaining links with parents; Thus, the information does not merely focus on individual academic achievement, but is generally used to promote the effectiveness of the school. Examples of how the school uses its analysis of individual performance and needs to meet the needs of its students are found in the YABC program, where students who have reached the age of 17 and who have only gained around 17 credits out of the 44 they need to graduate are offered the chance to join this fast track program that can earn them up to 12 credits, with the joint aim of getting some students back on the track to success and also enabling the school to boost its graduation figures. Another example is the GED program where students who are finding it difficult to succeed in the school's mainstream curriculum are able to participate in an alternative diploma course taken in day and in night options that offers a basic core curriculum that enables those who complete successfully the opportunity to go on to a Community College program. These are just two ways in which the school is using the data on individual performance to identify students for whom alternatives might bring a greater chance to gain success within the high school system.

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**Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.**

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

A large number of students enter the school performing at levels 1 and 2. The innovative curriculum, individual levels of support and good quality teaching enable them to make good progress. There are high expectations of the students, coupled with very effective measures to provide them with individual support. Areas of general weakness are addressed, such as low levels of literacy on entry, through the provision of double periods for English class. Many students face considerable difficulties in their home lives, and the school has put procedures into place to support families. For example, the procedures to tackle low rates of attendance are detailed and supportive. The principal has invested wisely in strengthening the team of counselors, who provide very effective support.

Students with the greatest need are targeted effectively. For example the Wilson Program has been introduced to support special education students who have difficulties with decoding words that is inhibiting their ability to read effectively. One very effective introduction has been the Jump Start Academy for ninth graders, which has accelerated their rates of progress to enable them to make good progress from their low point of entry.

Teachers are able to monitor progress through regular classroom based measures, such as quizzes and tests, in addition to using the more formal data. This information is shared with students so they are aware of the progress they are making towards their expected goals. Alternative provision for students is kept under review by the guidance department and dean's office. About 15% of enrolled students benefit from courses offered outside the normal school schedule, providing a more craft based education model. Similarly, the YABC program is a very good example of additional support being given to students in the upper grades over the age of 17 who are risk of not making graduation. This enables them to accelerate their progress through gaining up to 12 credits in support of their final graduation. In a spirit of collaboration, this facility is also offered to students from nearby high schools. Other alternatives to the general curriculum to which students might be admitted are the GED program and the evening school program on Mondays and Wednesdays, which allows students to gain up to 2 credits per semester.

There is additional provision for the higher attaining students, beyond the additional challenge that is expected as part of the general curriculum. For example, the "College Now" program enables them to take college courses and gain credits while still at the school, enabling between 6 and 9 credits to be gained towards an undergraduate course.

The range of support and provision means that every student who enters the school has an opportunity to find appropriate courses and to be effectively supported to achieve success, and accurate data on the levels of performance of individual students enables students to be challenged effectively. One excellent example of this was the student who arrived at the school very disenchanted with the education system – she told the reviewer how her life had been changed by the school, firstly in helping her to gain a feeling of self-worth through her participation in extra-curricular sporting activities and then to go on to gain success within her special education program. Not only did she feel no stigma in saying that she had such a program, but rather she felt a real pride in her achievement

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and motivation. There is also a real challenge for the very able academics, of who there are increasing numbers. Able academics were observed using the well-equipped astrology room doing a lesson on the theories on the long-term future of the universe, and being pushed by their teacher to explore philosophy as well as science, "How can we know about "forever"? We won't be able to understand it because we won't be around, but it doesn't stop us thinking about the idea..." led to a very interesting discussion.

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

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

The school has developed an interesting curriculum, which provides well for the school's diverse group of students. This includes a choice of pathways to success; it is continuing to make progress with planning so that it can break down into Small Learning Communities, each with its own focus, within the overall school. The very good teaching, innovative curriculum and levels of individual care and support means that students are all given opportunities to be successful. There is innovative thinking in the areas of specialism on the learning communities will focus and they have been chosen to maximize the opportunities for all students to follow a curriculum from which they will gain the most benefit. The detailed information now being gained on each student is certainly helping the school to plan a curriculum that engages and promotes the learning for individual students. A good example is the planning currently going into developing the opportunities in medical technology – with the school investing in the facilities to create a "dental surgery" in a specialist teaching room which students can follow courses in dental hygiene that could lead to later career interests. Teachers are supported by the in-house Teachers' Center, which is an excellent facility for continuous professional development. There has been a move away from teacher-dominated instruction, so that a lot of classroom activity involves both individual and collaborative learning. This enables students to accept greater responsibility for their own learning, while teachers provide effective support and guidance. The result is that learning is relevant and has come alive for many students. Behavior in the lessons is very good and classrooms were well laid out and with excellent displays of students' work.

Teachers have common planning time, so that they are able to meet together. Time is used effectively and as a result, teachers are able to develop shared expectations about standards, marking, and outcomes of students' work. Teachers have the opportunity to plan for meeting needs, both at class and at individual student level.

Informal lesson observations by the principal and her assistant principals take place on a daily basis. Teachers in place and well understand the procedures for formal observation. Since her appointment, the principal has identified unsatisfactory teaching and taken steps to address it. Teachers are used to learning from each other in a process of collaborative support.

One area of development is in the use of computers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Computer technology could be used in classrooms, through the provision of smart boards, for example. The performance of African-American boys is a concern for the school and they are reflecting on the necessary action to improve performance for this

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group of students.

There needs to be a greater consistency of expectation in school. For example, some staff is more rigorous than others in stopping students wearing hats around the school, or in greeting their classes at the door of their classroom to encourage prompt arrival at lessons.

At the heart of everything that the school does is the individual student and the diverse curriculum provides a very good framework for provision of courses and classes to meet the identified needs and aspirations of all its students.

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

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

The quality of leadership and management of the school is outstanding. The principal is providing clear direction and focus and is well supported by committed and very able assistant principals. As a team they are transforming expectations for the school and the period when standards and results were falling has been reversed. Throughout the school the teachers are committed to providing high quality teaching and support. Lessons observed were at least good and sometimes very good. Where there was an observed weakness it was in the failure to meet the school's policy for the delivery of a lesson- in particular the failure to provide a focused conclusion- the school should seek to ensure that its clear expectations regarding the nature of individual lesson plans are carried through in practice. The principal and her team of assistant principals monitor the quality of teaching and learning on a daily basis and are able to support the professional development of teachers in their instructional ability through the acquisition of a detailed and supportive knowledge of the strengths and areas for development of all members of staff. The principal has not shirked from using her detailed knowledge of the ability of individual teachers to deliver effective instruction to deem some teachers as lacking the rigor needed to meet the challenge of taking the school forward and to take appropriate steps to move them on from the school. The rise in the quality of teaching and the rigor of the process for performance management is behind the evaluation's finding of much very good teaching. The administration has also succeeded in creating a real feeling of teamwork, in which teachers are motivated to take the school forward and to improve the outcomes for students.

Because teaching is effective, and the focus has moved to one of collaborative learning, the majority of students observed in class were fully engaged in learning and getting a real sense of enjoyment from their studies. The support provided by the guidance team is of a very high quality and there is a team ethic throughout the school in which providing for the needs of the students are the key priority. The school acknowledges a need to improve levels of attendance. Data systems are used to track this not only in formal registration, but also to check arrival at each individual class. The home is automatically contacted when there is an absence. Where there are problems with attendance a daily card is maintained showing attendance at each lesson, which the parent signs every day. Chronic absence results in home visits and the possibility of outreach services. Attendance is still far short of the city average, but the school is taking vigorous steps to address this issue and is using data effectively in this process.

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The school is adept in seeking funding to support developments and in fostering community links. An excellent example of this was in the school production of *The Wiz*. An urban development grant made it possible to bring in theatre professionals to work with the students in producing a show of very high quality, which brought great credit to the individual students who participated and to the school as a whole.

**Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

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

There is clear evidence that the goals for accelerating learning and raising standards of achievement are starting to bring results. The range of programs provide a variety of learning routes and great care is taken to track individual students to ensure that they are able to maximize their achievements through their chosen pathway. Because the progress of individual students is being tracked it is possible to make comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms, which is done to good effect, this tracking has resulted in the identification of students who are under-performing, such as the African American young men. There is flexibility in planning, so that changes can be made, if appropriate, in a process that is centered on meeting the needs of individual students. Students are kept aware of their achievements and progress during the year and the close working relationships between teachers and the guidance team ensures that individual students receive very good support at an educational or social level.

Systems ensure that staff is involved in assessing and evaluating student progress during the year and information is gathered from a variety of sources through individual teacher assessments and through very good collaboration with the counselors and advisors, both formally and informally. Students who are thought to be underperforming are identified quickly and programs are put into place, monitored carefully through the Student Personnel Team. An example of how the school is enabling teachers to better evaluate student progress is in the structuring of common planning time to enable teachers to moderate students' work together. The need to rapidly promote students' performance is met in a variety of ways right from when they join the school. The grade 9 Jump Start curriculum, for example, provides extra time to reinforce basic skills, enabling students to be prepared for the Math A and Global Studies Regents in one year and enabling students to make very good progress from the low base line at which a majority enters the school. As students progress through school it is now taking steps to analyze the reasons why different groups of students have or haven't made the grade with Regents exams and from this school year individuals at risk are being targeted and are receiving individual support. At the same time the school is gaining increasing levels of academic success, reflected in the fact that at the time of the review 2006 university scholarships gained by students had already totaled \$2,200,000, with realistic expectations that this would be increased, with some students planning to go on to some prestigious colleges.

Parents receive regular summaries of their child's progress and this enables them to

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provide additional support for their child's needs.

### **Other key observations**

The issue of overcrowding remains, and the use of an annex, which is so far from the main school site, neither fully addresses the issue, nor helps in the process of developing school cohesion.

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## PART 4: EVALUATION CRITERIA GRADE SUMMARY

<b>Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and                      (2) progressing over time,                      on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standards-based,</li> <li>• consistent across students,</li> <li>• capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice,</li> </ul> <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the performance of different students to be compared, and</li> <li>• learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified.</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>		<b>X</b>	
<p>1.3 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>		<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable, goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>			<b>X</b>
<p>2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as warranting attention.</p>			<b>X</b>
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			<b>X</b>
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>			<b>X</b>
<p>2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners</p>			<b>X</b>

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<b>Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	0	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.			X
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.			X
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
3.6 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X

<b>Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	0	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer- evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			X

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Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.	o	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is reaching stated goals.			<b>X</b>
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.		<b>X</b>	
5.3 Information generated by interim assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			<b>X</b>
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.			<b>X</b>