



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Humanities and the Arts High School

High School 498

**207 - 01 116th Avenue
Queens
NY 11411**

Principal: Mercedes Qualls

Dates of review: November 27 – 29, 2006

Reviewer: Clive Parsons

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Humanities and the Arts High School is a theme based high school offering instructional programs in the performing and visual arts. The school is located in the Queens community of Cambria Heights. It shares a campus with three other themed high schools.

Over 500 students are enrolled, across grades 9 to 12. The student body is approximately 85 percent Black, mostly of Caribbean ancestry. Just fewer than eight percent of students are Hispanic, with smaller proportions of students from other ethnic backgrounds. There are fewer recent immigrants than in other City schools. Those that do arrive come mostly from Haiti, Guyana and Jamaica. The school has significantly fewer male students than female students. There is a lower proportion of special education students than in similar schools or schools across the City. The proportion of English language learners is significantly less than other schools. Fewer students are average for their grade on entry, although the proportion meeting the expected standard in English language arts and in mathematics is also lower. Student attendance is well above that of similar schools even though the mobility of the student body is also higher. The school does not receive Title 1 funding.

The teacher profile is broadly similar to that of other schools. A slightly lower proportion of teachers have taught in the school for more than two years, but a slightly higher proportion have more than five years experience overall. Teacher attendance is a little higher than in other schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school works hard to develop a comprehensive data set which enables more effective and quicker targeting of individual students.
- The principal has very high expectations, a clear vision for the continued improvement of the school and a very good capacity to achieve it.
- High expectations and targeted solutions are building the students' self confidence and belief which is supporting higher standards.
- Parents, students and staff appreciate the openness and accessibility of the principal and feel empowered to contribute.
- The administration has a very good understanding of what quality instruction looks like and a very good focus on achieving it consistently.
- There is some good quality instruction where data is used effectively to differentiate the support and challenge offered to students.
- The school uses data well to make curriculum and schedule adjustments to better meet the needs of students.
- Students behave well, are mostly well focused and appreciate the support that they receive from staff, believing that everyone wants them to succeed.
- Attendance is afforded a very high priority, with effective work producing good outcomes.
- The school knows itself well, with increasingly rigorous self evaluation, building its capacity and dispersing responsibility to support sustainable improvement.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop even greater accountability in teachers for their continuing professional development and in students for their own learning.
- Ensure that plans consistently detail how, when and by whom they will be evaluated to enable timely and effective modifications where necessary.
- Sharpen learning objectives and ensure that they are used to monitor and evaluate student understanding as lessons progress.
- Ensure that the programs being developed to support improvements in the progress and attainment of boys have the intended impact.
- Use data more consistently to differentiate instruction and to meet the needs of individual students more effectively.
- Ensure that the efforts to increase the involvement of parents and caregivers in supporting the education of their children have the intended impact.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Humanities and the Arts High School has worked hard over the past few years, following the arrival of the current principal, to develop a comprehensive data set for the student body. This enables the school to align both the curriculum and instruction to meet more closely the needs of the students. This, in turn, is helping to raise achievement. Data has been used effectively over the last few years to drive decision making, identify student weaknesses and to improve cohort performance. Staff, students and parents all agree that the principal has brought increased focus and rigor to the school's work and that it is an improving school as a result.

Much effort has also been put into raising the expectations of the school community and building the confidence and belief of the students. This, coupled with more focused and targeted support has produced a significant increase in the number of students applying to college and receiving scholarships.

The principal knows the school very well and has a very clear vision for its sustained improvement. Consequently, the necessary improvements noted in this report are very largely already contained within the school's improvement plans.

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

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal ensures that the school works hard to develop a comprehensive data set for each cohort of students. This identifies each student's starting point and tracks the progress that they make. It also indicates the value that the school adds to student achievement as the level reached steadily improves. A log is maintained of the credits earned by each student each term. This comprehensive tracking enables effective and quick targeting of those individual students who require additional support and intervention.

The school pays careful attention to attendance data because it recognizes poor attendance patterns are a significant barrier to student progress. Daily and weekly reports reveal patterns and trends that enable the school to focus its energy where it is most required and where it can have most impact. A group of students with attendance below 75 percent are identified for particular attention.

The principal studies trends in data and the performance of the school over time in order to evaluate its effectiveness and the improvements it has achieved. Comparison with other schools in the locality and across the City is an integral part of this evaluation, as is comparison between different content areas and classes. Disaggregation of the data also enables the school to look at the performance of groups, such as males and females,

special education students and English language learners. Electronic data gathering makes this task easier to accomplish. The school is particularly committed to improving the overall performance in mathematics and the general progress made by male students.

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.

Data analysis increasingly lies at the heart of the school’s planning. The principal has very high expectations, which the whole school community share increasingly. This ensures that the goals and objectives established are developed in a collaborative way and are challenging. A good number of the content objectives within the Comprehensive Education Plan are statistical and directly measurable. They are impact and outcome driven.

The school produces very challenging goals for student attendance by analyzing its own previous performance, together with that of other schools. Attendance is much higher than in similar schools and higher than other schools across the City. The principal and attendance workers are not complacent. They recognize that the motivating nature of this small learning community should enable the very challenging goals to be met.

The school pays particular attention to those students who are identified with the greatest needs. Quicker identification and targeting of such students ensures greater impact on their progress. The data shows that male students do not perform as well as female students. Specific programs, some with the support of external agencies, are being implemented to address this performance gap. The school is determined to make this impact positively on the students’ self-belief, confidence and consequently their academic progress.

The principal is raising the expectations of the whole school community. This is both in terms of what students can achieve during their schooling and also in later life. There is a greater focus on achieving Regents diplomas. This is supporting an increasing self confidence and belief which is resulting in students setting themselves increasingly challenging goals. The school recognizes the importance of parents and caregivers in the process and works hard to engage them in it. While disappointed with the attendance at parent forums, all concerned are determined to increase the involvement of families.

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 uses data well to make curriculum and schedule adjustments. Better sequencing in mathematics, for example, provides better continuity for students and improves progress. The school is also developing an interdisciplinary English language arts and United States history course for grade 9 students in order to improve their literacy skills. Earlier experience of taking tests and improved preparation for them also help to

drive up the students' scores. Staffing and other budgeting decisions are appropriately based on the school's plans to raise performance.

Teachers are held accountable for the quality of their instruction. In turn teachers hold themselves accountable to students and their families. There is some good quality instruction, where data is used effectively to differentiate the support and challenge provided to students and to group them accordingly. The school recognizes that some teachers do not consistently use data to differentiate instruction to sufficiently meet the needs of individual students. The school is also working to sharpen the objectives developed for lessons, to ensure that they are monitored and reviewed at stages throughout the lesson. Students behave well and are mostly well focused in class. They generally engage well in the activities offered.

Relationships between adults and students are based upon mutual respect. The students appreciate the support that they receive from the staff and believe that everyone concerned wants them to do their best and to succeed. High expectations, together with targeted solutions, are building the students' self confidence which in turn is supporting higher standards. Student attendance is afforded a very high priority, with effective work producing good outcomes.

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 school is very careful to try to appoint new staff who are self reflective and who it believes will make a positive contribution to its sustained improvement. Professional development has a high priority and is based on information from a variety of sources including direct lesson observations, student performance data and teacher needs assessment surveys. Professional development is aligned fully with the school's plans to improve the impact of instruction and there is evidence of this translating into practice in the classroom. It is well supported by a range of personnel including a mathematics coach and administrators, as well as a teacher centre. The administration has a very good understanding of what quality instruction looks like and a very good focus on achieving it consistently.

The principal ensures that improvement is sustainable. She is carefully building the capacity of the school and dispersing responsibility. This is helping to develop even greater accountability in teachers for their professional development, as well as making students responsible for their own learning. Nevertheless, the principal also recognizes that this is presently inconsistent. A weekly common meeting time for the faculty to meet in and across discipline groups is increasing the degree of collaborative activity.

The principal has very high expectations and a clear vision for the continued improvement of the school. She has a very good capacity to achieve it. Parents, students and staff appreciate the openness and accessibility of the principal. They feel empowered to contribute to the school's continuing improvement. The school runs smoothly and expectations and routines are carried out consistently. This is especially important given the nature of sharing the building and some specific facilities with three other schools. Partnerships with external agencies are increasing. Those that exist are used well to support the school's stated objectives, such as raising the achievements of male students.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal knows the school well. The increasingly rigorous self review and evaluation is appropriately based on the data and other evidence available. Comparisons in the performance of different content areas and classes identify reasons and causes of achievement gaps. This is supporting more candid self and peer review for staff.

Appropriate structures and systems are in place to support the ongoing evaluation of progress. Learning walkthroughs are used well to provide a snapshot of progress towards goals. Monthly planning meetings address attendance and discipline issues effectively. Interventions are monitored and revised based upon the data. A similar process is in place to address academic issues. Cohort data is used to evaluate student progress and modify program interventions as appropriate.

Attendance and additional intervention services provide good examples of the way that the school responds quickly to any identified weaknesses. This enables more timely interventions, which makes them more effective. Plans do not consistently detail how, when and by whom they will be evaluated, however. Similarly, interim evaluations do not always focus sufficiently on the impact of the actions taken. Some tightening is necessary to ensure that all staff are able to make more timely and effective modifications if required.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Humanities and the Arts High School [HS 498]	∅	✓	+
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	