



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Crotona Academy High School

High School 321

**639 St Ann's Avenue
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Anthony Harris

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Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Crotona Academy High School is one of three Diploma Plus alternative high schools in the City. It is located in the Bronx and its students travel from the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn. The school opened in 2004. The school site comprises a number of modular units, which provide seven instructional areas, a combined recreation and health area and a cafeteria. There is also a basketball court. All instructional areas have up-to-date computers and all areas except the fitness area have a Smartboard.

Currently 151 students from grades 9 to 12 are enrolled. They are grouped into cohorts indicating the expected year of graduation. English language learners and special education students are included in cohort groups. Six percent of the students are English language learners and 9% are special education students. Fifty-two percent of students are Hispanic and 48% Black. The school is fully utilized with a waiting list of potential students.

Eighty-one percent of students are Title 1 eligible which is above the average for similar and City schools. Attendance is currently 64.5%, which includes students with long term absence. Not including long term absence students, attendance is 69%. Both these figures are below the average for similar and City schools.

The principal was appointed in September 2005 and an assistant principal joined the administrative team following his appointment.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal delivers a clear message of high expectations for attendance, behavior and academic progress to all students.
- The school provides a caring and supportive environment where learning and making progress is clearly evident.
- Productive working relationships with community organizations support instruction and help students to move onto college and work.
- The curriculum structure and programming focus well on the needs of students, enabling them to achieve graduation.
- Extensive data is gathered efficiently and effectively on all students through formal test scores and teacher records, giving a clear picture of academic progress.
- Effective changes have led to increased numbers of students graduating each year.
- Creativity has been shown in delivering the curriculum within the accommodation available.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to identify and address causes for student absence, in order to increase student progress and the numbers of graduating students.
- Ensure a consistent approach to instruction through routine application of the agreed framework for curriculum delivery.
- Produce a single integrated plan for each student showing the steps needed to achieve their goals with interim checkpoints to measure rates of progress and make timely adjustments.
- Ensure that all written feedback following classroom observations makes clear what needs to be improved and how this can be achieved.
- Continue to build the confidence of teachers to use technology imaginatively and creatively.
- Consider how to re-establish a forum for students to express their views and influence school life.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The goal of the school is for all students to graduate and they receive strong support in this. The principal was appointed less than two years ago and has made effective changes at the school. Before his appointment no student had graduated, but this has changed with a gradual increase in graduate numbers. The principal is not complacent and is determined to improve graduation rates further. He challenges under-performance from staff and students alike. Older students perceive the positive impact the principal has made on the school community and say, "The principal put this school into shape, made you proud to say you come to Crotona."

Extensive data is gathered on students' progress and performance, in academic subjects and individual student progress. Goals for individual students are not shared with different staff and plans for students relate to test dates and do not include other significant times or events. The curriculum is well programmed and successfully accommodates students joining in the middle of the school year. Technology is well resourced, but underutilized as a tool for student learning. Students and their parents and guardians value the sense of family at the school, where all members of staff know students by name and not by a number or code. Sporadic and long term absence are major factors impeding graduation rates and the school is working to raise attendance further. School-wide plans are clear with defined interim measures and goals. Plans are amended when indicated by evidence and the school is adaptable in making changes to match the needs of the students.

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 well developed.

The school gathers detailed information on all students, which starts when they join and continues throughout their time at the school. When students enter, information is sought from the students' previous school and is supplemented by detailed diagnostic tests in reading. This is now being extended to include a diagnostic test in mathematics. Records for all students are up-dated in each of the ten weekly marking periods. In this way the school ensures that it has a regularly up-dated picture of student progress and performance.

Teachers continue to carry out formal assessments and compile evidence of student progress, through portfolios of student work, to show progress made over time. The priority for the school is for all students to achieve sufficient credits and Regents passes for a high school diploma, and records clearly show how credits are being built up towards this. The school carefully records the progress of every student in detail, including English language learners and special education students.

Data is well used to identify students in need of increased levels of support. It is also used to identify weak areas within subjects and provide programs to overcome these. Students are not considered by categories or groups, as the focus is on identifying and providing for each student's needs whatever their ethnicity or gender.

The principal is adept at analyzing and interpreting assessment information and presenting this to students and teachers so they are well informed. He compares Regents scores to show differences between different test periods and breaks down scores to show the performance between different classes and strands within each subject. The school is recently established and comparisons are made where data is statistically reliable and the comparison is meaningful.

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 plans programs based upon predicted numbers of students who will graduate during the year. The goal for students to achieve sufficient credits and passes to graduate is made clear to them. Information and goals for students are known by different staff, but are not presented in a single integrated plan showing milestones, interim goals and other activities. Student portfolios are used to analyze components within each subject where students need to improve or produce further work. Where data shows low performance, strategies are put in place to overcome this. For example, an additional English language arts teacher has been hired to raise the support for students with low scores in reading and English language arts.

Extensive information on expectations, progress and performance is shared with students and their parents or guardians. This starts at the initial orientation for new students when the principal makes clear the school's expectations for attendance, behavior and academic progress. Information about absences, concerns, achievements and positive changes is shared throughout the year. Each semester students are advised of the credits they need to achieve. Assessment rubrics are prominently displayed in all classes, so students can evaluate their work. Report cards provide information about students' test scores, but the teachers' comments on these scores are vague and do not specify the actions students need to take in order to improve. A shared focus on improving student performance is clearly evident at the school. Up-to-date information on progress is displayed in classrooms, keeping staff and students well informed. Students' views are valued, but there is no forum for them to articulate their views and influence the life of the school.

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 curriculum structure and programming is clearly focused on enabling students to graduate. Programming reflects the needs of each student and is sufficiently adaptable to enable students to graduate faster than at other schools. Creativity has been shown in providing the mandated curriculum within the modular units of the school. Art, physical and health education programs share an open space and flexibility in programming means

that all students have equal access. After-school and Saturday programs provide students with additional opportunities to achieve credits. Teachers work hard to overcome students' limiting beliefs about their capacity to learn and make progress through celebrating every step students make on their road to success and graduation. Work is linked to students' interests and is age-appropriate, which increases their motivation to study.

The school uses the Essential Elements of Instruction model to provide a structure for curriculum delivery. However, this is not fully implemented by all teachers, so there is inconsistency in instruction. Teachers are held accountable by the principal who uses assessment data to support the rationale for consistent use of the model. Students at the school are active in classes and apply themselves to learning. They value active learning where they participate in classes. All teaching areas, include physical education are well equipped with computers and Smart Boards to vary how instruction is delivered. The use of Smart Boards is limited, as teachers use these to define tasks rather than a resource to enhance instruction and learning.

The principal ensures that staffing, budgeting and scheduling meet the needs of the students. He allocates teachers to address the needs of particular students. The principal also makes good use of external sources of funding. The depth of comparison and analysis of information extends beyond academic records and is illustrated by the way the principal programs classes taking account of patterns of lateness. Lateness and absence are challenged consistently and efforts are made to encourage students to come to school. There have been successes in increasing attendance and the school continues to address short and long term absence.

The school provides a caring and supportive environment where learning and making progress is clearly evident. The small site and limited accommodation brings staff and students into close contact, which results in supportive networks for every student. This extends to staff making wake-up calls to some students' homes in the morning which prompt them to attend and arrive on time for classes. Attendance is followed up on the second day of absence and students know they need to make up work missed through absence. Reducing short-term and long-term attendance remains a priority for the school.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has a clear picture of staff strengths and the needs of students and he plans instruction so that student learning is maximized. In hiring teachers, he seeks staff able to relate effectively to students with complicated lives, prepared to work flexibly to deliver an accelerated program and use technology imaginatively. New and existing staff are well supported in their professional development. The current priorities are using Smart Boards and analyzing and applying data to increase student learning outcomes. Effective use is made of common planning time, when all staff share expertise and good practice within and across subject areas. The annual two day retreat provides an opportunity for staff to share expertise and to focus on development priorities. Some staff reflect on their practice and time has been scheduled into the 2007 retreat for all staff to do so. Established teachers are partnered with newly hired teachers to provide focused support in working within the Diploma Plus structure.

The principal and assistant principal undertake formal and informal observations of all classes. They know the teachers well as the school is small and the layout of the modular units means that all classes are close together. There are inconsistencies in the written feedback given to teachers after formal observations. Some teachers have precise written feedback on what they do well, areas they need to improve and strategies to enable this to be achieved. Other teachers receive feedback that is vague and does not make clear exactly what teachers need to do differently.

The principal is well respected by students, parents and staff. To some students he is more than a principal, being “the only father figure some students have.” He makes clear expectations for respectful behavior, which is achieved in a quiet, positive manner with little need for direct confrontation. The principal models this for his staff in a style described by students as, “he gives anyone the eye and it stops you.” The principal and assistant principal are good role models... As a result, the school is a well-ordered learning community. Staff and students are expected to follow procedures and working arrangements. Where staff do not follow the agreed ways of working, support is given to enable them to move towards the whole-school approach.

The school has strong working relationships with the Commonwealth Corporation which supports the implementation of the Essential Elements of Instruction model. The collaboration with the South Overall Development Corporation program provides valuable support to students in their transition from school to college or workplace.

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 well developed.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is well structured, with measurable goals that allow the leadership to monitor progress well. Goals are based upon student data and the Chancellor's targets. The principal is fastidious in his use of both qualitative and quantitative data to monitor progress against the Comprehensive Education Plan goals. He is well supported by information from the guidance counselor on student progress and Regents test results. Where changes in intervention are indicated by data, these are made promptly and smoothly.

Following recent test results, the principal reviewed instruction and highlighted the need for an additional mathematics teacher and a focus on problem-solving within the subject in order to improve future results. Wide-reaching changes affecting the whole school are made when evidence shows this to be necessary, such as changing the three semester program to provide instruction to match students' needs more effectively.

The principal's performance review also ensures that school goals are formally reviewed. Where changes are necessary additional goals are agreed by the leadership team and defined in addenda to the Comprehensive Education Plan. Whole school plans make clear to staff and administration what each goal is and the actions needed to achieve it.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Crotona Academy High School (HS 321)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

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

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

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

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