



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Christopher Columbus High School

**High School 415
925 Astor Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469**

Principal: Ms L Fuentes

Dates of review: November 8 - 10, 2006

Reviewer: M Groucutt

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Christopher Columbus High is a Title 1 school that currently has 1961 enrolled students of whom 1695 are in general education and 269 are special education students. Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds and 316 are English language learners. Over the last several years the surrounding population has shifted from being primarily of Italian and Jewish origin and now the school has students whose families originated in a number of countries, including Albania, Russia, the Caribbean islands, Korea, Vietnam and Laos. This is in addition to the primarily Spanish-speaking populations from Central and South America. This has created an international feel within the school which it sees as a real strength.

The current principal is in her fourth year in the post and most of her cabinet have arrived at the school, or taken their present position, since she took the job. They have brought about a transformation in a school that was cited for closure and it remains the only such school to have won a reprieve because of the robust and well founded arguments it put forward for its retention. Since then it has gone on to demonstrate good progress as it has moved to re-create itself as four small learning centers within the framework of the larger school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The clear vision and inspirational leadership of the principal.
- The clear focus of the cabinet on promoting effective teaching and learning.
- The commitment of the whole school community to making Christopher Columbus High School ever more successful.
- The provision of opportunity for over age students to gain success in the public school system through the Renaissance Group.
- The provision of an integrated way to support students in gaining credits towards graduation through the Young Adult Borough Centre Program
- The analysis of the needs of the large numbers of English language learners enabling targeted support to be implemented.
- The creation of positive links with the neighboring Junior High, and with the other High Schools that share the same campus, in order to promote the ideals of effective community education.
- The holding to account of teachers for the performance of the students they teach.
- The acceptance of, and welcome for, students from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen differentiation using the data now available to focus on individual needs.
- Ensure that the most able students are set more challenging tasks in order to maintain their interest and motivation.
- Develop the effective use of technology across the whole curriculum as a tool for effective teaching and learning.
- Ensure that the quality of all teaching matches that of the best.
- Ensure that the assessment of students' work is always developmental, so that students know how to improve their standards.
- Ensure that students are aware of the level at which they are working as well the effort they are making.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with many well developed features.

When cited for closure four years ago, Christopher Columbus High embarked on a campaign to preserve its status, based on the fact that its results were already above the City average. It remains the only school cited in this way that has remained open, though now somewhat reduced in size, as four other small schools have joined the campus. However, it remains a large school with over 1900 students on roll.

In preserving its identity it has re-created itself, based on the model of small learning communities. It is now able to develop an environment that reduces alienation, promotes a sense of community and encourages higher levels of student and staff participation. It has become a data rich school and, while there is room for continuing development in areas such as the differentiation for individual learners, the school has made big strides in using this to promote effective instruction. The clear focus is on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and in supporting its students to achieve success, even when they have experienced a long period of failure. The school has clearly made great strides over the last four years

It also has a clear vision of community. Staff and students come from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and this is celebrated. Within its own locality, Columbus is active in forming very positive relationships with the other schools on the campus and with its nearest junior high school.

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 uses data very effectively to measure the progress made by students, as well as to help it judge the effectiveness of its instruction. A variety of formal and informal sources are used, some of them quite creative, such as the filming of the activities of the Renaissance Group during the year to provide a visual measure of progress in the activities being undertaken.

The data available through the formal systems could be further refined; for example the record card designation of "White" for an ethnic group does not take into account the specific challenges created by the expanding Albanian student population. However, the school does make effective use of group diagnostics, such as that provided by the Princeton Review analysis. The school undertakes term-by-term analysis of where its students should be, and those at risk are identified for support. Where problems are identified, such as in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in English language arts among some of the population sub-groups such as English language learners, the school is proactive in seeking strategies to address this. For example, teachers have collaborated in developing the writing curriculum to meet identified needs. The progress

being made by the school has already resulted in AYP goals for mathematics being met across all groups.

The large numbers of English language learners does pose particular problems, because of the numbers and the variety of languages from around the world that are spoken. The needs and language capability of these students is analyzed carefully so that targeted support can be provided.

The school does not find it easy to compare itself with similar schools of which there are few in terms of its composition, though it does compare itself with other large schools. Such comparisons are favorable.

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 amount of data available to teachers has increased since the current principal and the cabinet she has created has arrived, and it is now a data rich school. A real strength is in the support that it gives to students who are in the greatest need of improvement. To give just one example, this is well illustrated by the care that goes into analyzing the specific needs of English language learners (ELL). However, not all teachers are yet able to demonstrate effective instruction for this group, some having expectations that are too low. The results gained in mathematics, in which 15 ELL students passed the Regents during their first year in the school and the United States, goes to illustrate just what is possible.

The school is now aware of the need to provide a greater level of challenge for the highest-performing students, at the same time as maintaining the thrust to get more students up to grade-level competency. This process would be supported by a process of teacher evaluation of student work that rewards effort, but also stresses the academic level achieved in particular pieces of work. Teacher assessment should also emphasize what students should do in order to make their work even better. There is much good work being carried out by teachers, and further professional development may bring further improvements.

Students and parents are now more actively engaged in improving learning. A very good example is in the peer coaching being developed in mathematics. Students are also more aware of their own learning needs through a greater engagement in the whole school community and, as a result they are better able to see the relevance of what they are doing. Parents expressed the very strong view that the school had radically transformed itself for the better since its campaign to stay open. As a result they felt that their children are now much more actively engaged in learning and making good progress.

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.

There have been exciting innovations in the curriculum for over-age and lower performing students, based on an identification of their needs. In some cases this is enabling students to gain success for the first time since they arrived at high school. In particular, the Renaissance Group is proving successful in attracting a group of students, some of whom have not attended school regularly for many years. The school is now hoping to extend this mode to its over-age English language learners so that they can receive targeted support. Much of the funding for this initiative comes from the school’s own resources, which is a good example of the school using its funding for better student engagement.

Another interesting group is the Young Adult Borough Center which is intended for students over the age of 17 who have accumulated at least 17 credits, giving them a chance to gain the extra they require during evening classes. In order to support this group the school employs many directly, or arranges employment locally, and they get support from the school social worker. This provides motivation and allows them to move towards completing their education while still earning the minimum wage.

There are numerous examples of good practice throughout the school. The 9th Grade recovery program enables students to gain credits they are missing so that won’t be held over. The Credit Accumulation Program targets students in their third and fourth years at high school, but who are not currently eligible for Regents entry.

However, in terms of the education of its general population, the school could further refine its ability to differentiate the curriculum. While it does differentiate into grouped ability, the needs of individual students could be better identified through using the data available. There is also inconsistency in the levels of student engagement. At the moment the quality of all teaching fails to live up to the quality of the best.

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.

The clear vision and inspirational leadership of the principal has been instrumental in moving the school forward. This has been reinforced effectively by the cabinet, which is focused on promoting effective teaching and learning, and making effective use of data to provide solid information on achievement. However, the great progress made over the last four years has also been a great team effort involving the whole school community. This was evidenced by the campaign to save the school, in which administrators, teachers, school security agents, parents, the teachers’ trade union, the regional office and others sought to retain the school. In coming together in this way a focus was created for taking a radical look at the school’s curriculum and trying to align it with the needs of the very diverse student population. This has been a remarkable achievement. Focused plans for improving outcomes are now coming to fruition with the creation of the four small learning communities (SLCs), the names of which have been chosen by the students. Team

meetings within these SLCs are focusing on the needs of individual students and encompass guidance staff as well as teachers in good examples of collaborative support for maximizing individual potential.

The principal and assistant principals frequently observe classroom teaching, formally and informally. Teachers are held responsible for the outcomes of their students, and they are also being held personally responsible for implementing strategies to support progress for those identified as being at risk. Youth development and support services are likewise utilized to promote effective learning. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and students are not always aware of the levels at which they are achieving. Similarly, rubrics could be strengthened and displayed prominently on bulletin boards to provide frequent visual reinforcement of what is required to move a student's work up to the next level and so to support the acceleration of individual learning.

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.

Diagnostic assessments to track individual students are being developed, although they are not yet used consistently by all teachers. The creation of the four SLCs is helping to focus on individual need and this will support the development of greater differentiation. At the moment, however, the lack of technology as a tool for developing the quality of teaching and learning may be a factor in holding back such individualization. Formal and informal observation by the principal and assistant principals is supporting the development of good practice. The introduction of learning walks and intervisitations to colleagues' classrooms is starting to build the confidence of teachers in refining their skills. This in turn will improve the ability of teachers to develop effective assessment of student progress through the observation of the best practices of peers, as well as through professional development opportunities. It is also starting to focus attention on planning to meet individual needs, including the ability to develop a greater flexibility in response to identified need.

The tools to enable such individual flexibility have been created at a management level and the challenge for the school is to implement these at a consistently high level in all classrooms. The progress made by the school over the last four years has been remarkable and there is a clear and focused desire to achieve further success, so that all students will be in a position to maximize their individual potential. The school has the ability to continue its rapid developments in improving the quality of teaching and learning. It has been a remarkable progress and reflects well on the efforts put into transforming the quality of education. The continuing commitment to success means that there is no reason why this progress should not be maintained into the future.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Christopher Columbus High School [HS 415]	∅	✓	+
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	