



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Pelham Preparatory Academy

High School 542

925 Astor Avenue

Bronx

NY 10469

Principal: Mrs Jane Aronoff

Dates of review: November 3 and 6, 2006

Reviewer: Eileen Hill

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school is a small, 9 through 12 grade high school with around 450 students enrolled. The overwhelming majority of students are either Black or Hispanic, fairly evenly distributed; 15 percent are White or Asian. Only a small number of students are English language learners, but around 8% are special education students. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school was formed as part of the Bronx New Century High School Initiative and now shares the site with three other small schools and the downsized original school. The school's main aim is to ensure students achieve the very highest standards and that most, if not all, gain a place at college or university. To facilitate this aim, the school has fostered a strong formal partnership with the University of Vermont and also works closely with other colleges and universities in the region. At 92%, attendance is higher than that in similar or City schools, and is a strong priority.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Data is used very effectively to support the understanding of performance and progress of individual students and to drive developments and academic success.
- School leaders have very high expectations of students and use data and other information to ensure students achieve their potential and beyond.
- Goals and plans for the school reflect the principles of high performance and high quality instruction.
- The emphasis on high expectations and on students gaining college places is a very considerable strength of the school.
- The quality of the curriculum is very good; it is fully aligned with the school's goals and vision and adjusted flexibly to meet the needs of individuals.
- For the most part, instructional programs engage the students fully and are collaborative and challenging; teachers are knowledgeable, command respect and are prepared to take account of the needs of individuals.
- School attendance is well above the City average and above the average for similar schools and is rigorously monitored.
- The principal is respected by students and the school community and has significant capacity to effect change; she receives strong support from the assistant principals.
- Guidance counselling makes a significant contribution to the progress made by individual students.
- Regular, periodic assessments of students' progress are used to revise plans and goals, to reschedule programs and generally to ensure students are on track to meet graduation requirements.

What the school needs to improve

- Consider how to use the data collected to focus more closely on the progress and achievement of different groups, for example, male and female students.
- Ensure students are not overloaded with activities and that information about what they are required to do is timely.
- Further improve the involvement of parents and caregivers in the work of the school and in the setting of goals to improve their children's achievements.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

Leadership is particularly strong at the school. Expectations are very high and well over 90% of students eligible to graduate did so in summer 2006. From the moment they enter the school in grade 9, students are prepared for making applications to colleges or universities and those that graduated this year all gained a two year or four year place at college or university. This is a significant achievement given that the school does not select its students and many come to the school with low levels of performance in English and mathematics.

The school makes effective use of data to monitor the progress and performance of the students and to set appropriately challenging goals. Teachers and school leaders are selected for their strong capability and for their commitment to promoting effective learning. Teachers are well qualified and receive relevant professional development. The quality of the curriculum and the very wide range of additional activities, are great strengths of the school. Students thrive in the atmosphere and develop independent thinking skills and creative approaches to problem solving. Students are usually fully engaged by instructional activities. Assessment of progress is very regular and the outcomes used to foster further developments or prompt interventions. Thus, the school makes very effective use of summer schools to ensure students are on track with credit accumulation or Regents examinations and, for the very able, provides advanced placement classes in a number of subjects.

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 a range of data from its assessment of class work, homework, credit accumulation and Regents examinations to understand the performance and progress of students in each grade and class. Swift action is taken in response to findings. For example, a summer school was set up last summer for students in all grades whose performance fell below that required. The focus of data is on individuals and the school has excellent systems in place for monitoring individuals and intervening where necessary. Data is not yet used to focus specifically on groups; for example, boys perform less well than girls but the school has not yet begun to interrogate its data to tease out the possible reasons for this.

The school's main mission is to enable students to achieve high academic success and for most, if not all, to obtain a college place. Many students enter the school with low performance in both reading and mathematics, but the school pushes such students, along with all others, to make significant improvements and uses its ongoing data analysis to drive up levels of achievement. Thus, of the first cohort through the school, 96% graduated and all of these obtained a college place for a two or four year course.

School leaders are fully very aware of how students perform in relation to each other and what progress is made term-on-term and year-on-year. They know they are setting very challenging goals for students and that in achieving these students will exceed the expectations for City and similar schools.

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 well developed.

School leaders plan extensively to ensure the very high expectations they have of students’ performance and success are met. Goals are appropriate to the drive to maintain and improve standards, with an emphasis this year on differentiation in instructional activity. Other goals include a focus on improving the discursive writing skills of students and on the development of creativity and thinking skills. All teachers and support tutors are involved in goal-setting. While not always expressed in quantifiable, measurable terms, plans and goals drive the activities of the school and help it to achieve its considerable success. Particular attention is given, in the school’s planning and data analysis, to students who are not on track with credit accumulation or Regents qualifications. In addition, the school focuses on challenging the high achievers by providing advanced placement classes in a number of subjects for those who achieve good grades in Regents examinations.

High expectations are conveyed to all members of the school community and students are very aware of the expectations on them and thrive as a result. Parents are kept informed of their children’s progress and have formal and informal opportunities to visit the school and meet with teachers; for example, parents and students can attend the daily common planning meeting to discuss issues of progress. The school has found it difficult to involve the majority of parents fully in the work of the school or in contributing formally to their children’s achievements.

The school’s main mission and its goals for academic success are shared and understood by all partners.

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 well developed.

The quality of the curriculum is a great strength of the school. Instructional activity, while closely in line with the mandated curriculum, is used flexibly to develop creative and independent thinking. The data generated by tests and examinations is used to refine schedules for individual students and to adjust the content of instruction to ensure appropriate learning and high levels of challenge.

Teachers are fully accountable for the performance and progress of students and share in the development plans and goals set by school leaders, for example, by ensuring resources are geared appropriately to the learning styles and needs of individuals. All

budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are driven by the school's overarching goals and by the needs of individual or groups of students.

Students are almost always fully engaged by the instruction they receive. They are encouraged to collaborate in their learning and frequently lead group discussions, demonstrate solutions to problems using the whiteboards, or draw together conclusions for others to consider. The level of challenge is high, sometimes exceptionally so.

Attendance is a high priority for the school and at around 92 percent, daily attendance exceeds that for similar and City schools. Daily checks are made during common planning meetings for each grade and unauthorized absence followed up immediately by grade teachers or the assistant principals.

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 principal has very high expectations of her staff and selects those she believes capable of sharing in the mission of the school and delivering high quality outcomes. Teachers are well qualified. The assistant principals and other administrators are strong leaders and make excellent contributions to the leadership of the school.

Professional development is very firmly driven by the needs revealed by data on performance and progress. The emphasis this year on differentiation and on improving students' writing skills is an example of this. If the regular evaluations of performance and progress reveal issues in a particular subject or class, then prompt action is taken to provide additional guidance and support or to reschedule the class. The principal regularly observes classes, as do the two assistant principals, and informative feedback is given. School leaders keep a very high profile around the school and make very frequent informal observations of the work in classrooms. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and the more experienced teachers make written observations of their colleagues. The frequency and regularity of observations support the shared understanding of good practice in teaching which is so noticeable in the school.

School leaders meet very regularly to evaluate their plans and goals. Teachers meet daily in grade teams and a member of the cabinet always attends such meetings. By this means, school leaders keep a very tight hold on what is happening. The principal is respected by all members of the community. Students and parents recognize that she is "tough" but that she cares about the success of individuals. The school runs smoothly although students feel they are sometimes overloaded with activities and that they are not always given timely warning of them.

Student counselors provide high-quality, rigorous support to individual students. The school has extensive associations with outside bodies and students are involved in a very wide range of sporting and cultural activities. Every opportunity is taken to extend the horizons of the students through internships and visits to colleges and other places of interest. The school has strong partnerships with local colleges and other local organizations, such as the Museum of Natural History in New York. It has a very close association with the University of Vermont and uses this to provide early experience for students of making a college application and for meetings with admissions tutors. This happens in the 9th grade.

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.

Students are assessed very regularly, both formally at each marking period and for credit accumulation and Regents examinations, and informally on a daily basis by teachers. Data and other information are used to make swift adjustments and to signal interventions. Students' progress is also regularly compared across classes and subjects, with detailed information kept about the progress of individuals. School leaders use such comparisons to ask questions of teachers about progress and to put strategies in place to develop the quality of instructional activity if necessary.

Data and other information are used as the basis for revisions and change to the curriculum and to the scheduling of classes. Students' progress and success are always at the forefront of decision making in the school. The principal's motto in terms of driving forward student success is: "Whatever it takes." This exemplifies the ethos of the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Pelham Preparatory Academy (HS 542)	∅	✓	+
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