



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Fort Hamilton High School**

**High School 490**

**8301 Shore Road  
Brooklyn  
NY 11209**

**Principal: Jo Ann Chester**

**Dates of review: December 4 - 5, 2007**

**Lead Reviewer: Joy Stopher**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Fort Hamilton High School is a high school with 4539 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 5.5% Black, 32.9% Hispanic, 30.2% White, and 28.2% Asian students. The student body includes 19.7% English language learners and 7.5% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91.6%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school is oversubscribed with almost twice the number of students it was intended to accommodate.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal gives very strong instructional leadership and facilitates a high level of collaboration amongst staff.
- The school makes highly effective use of data especially in order to improve the performance and progress of English language learners and special education students.
- The breadth of the curriculum and range of programs and clubs offered to students are stunning.
- The school is a reflective community committed to continuously monitoring and revising its plans to make sure they work.
- The principal and assistant principals are totally focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning through a highly effective program of professional development.
- The school makes very good use of its understanding of student progress to make programming decisions, which are highly effective in supporting differentiation.
- There are very strong systems and structures in place that ensure the school is a well-ordered community, characterized by trust and respect.
- The school takes every opportunity to develop effective partnerships with outside organizations and increase resources for learning.
- Students are encouraged to play a full part in the life of the school.
- There are extremely high expectations for students and staff in all aspects of the school's work.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to focus on developing strategies to increase the level of student engagement amongst those most difficult to reach.
- Maximize the use of the new technology systems to enable staff to make an even more precise analysis of the performance and progress of the lowest performing students.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

### **Overall Evaluation**

#### **This school is well developed.**

Fort Hamilton High School is an exceptionally well-organized and effective school. There is a very high level of mutual trust and respect and very high expectations throughout. This has resulted in an increasingly high level of student achievement over several years and the excellent reputation the school has in its community. The nature of the student population has changed and the school is making great efforts to make sure that all student groups make the maximum progress possible. It intends to continue to develop strategies to engage the lowest performing students and maximize the use of technology systems to pinpoint the precise areas for improvement for these groups. There is a multitude of documentation containing detailed information about policies, codes of conduct, structures and systems so everyone is fully aware of the expectations. The principal is a very strong instructional leader who focuses her attention on what happens in the classroom and actively pursues excellence at all levels. Students respond to her with exceptional warmth and value her personal interest in their successes. The breadth of the curriculum and range of activities available to students are simply stunning; from marching bands to successful sports teams and virtual enterprises. The school uses its progress data extremely well to inform programming decisions, which maximize the opportunities to provide differentiated teaching and learning. This is having a very positive impact in raising student achievement. The cabinet is an exceptionally strong, collaborative and very effective team. They regularly observe demonstration lessons together to see the extent of the implementation of school-wide goals and to share good practice across departments. School leaders regard professional development as the key to whole school improvement and it is extensive. Since the last Quality Review, the school has ensured that each department now has very specific goals, has developed robust procedures for monitoring lesson observations and has extended the health education curriculum. The inquiry team has emerged from a well-established literacy team set up to focus in depth on this aspect of the school's work.

### **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 the student's progress over time.**

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

There are very strong and robust systems in place to collect and analyze data at many levels and which have been the starting point for the successful raising of student

achievement. The school has maintained and made full use of an extensive database over a number of years to inform programming, decision-making, instruction and planning for further improvement. In addition to the analysis of a wide range of data such as that from State tests, Regents exams and Advanced Placement performance, there is a review of the annual school report card and progress report. Departments organize bi-weekly tests in every subject area so class teachers have a very regular and detailed picture of the progress of individual students. The school reviews cohort data periodically. The database enables the comparison of student scholarship overall, over a three-year period as well as in each grade level. The lack of similar schools restricts the direct comparison of performance, but the school makes every attempt to use what qualitative data is available. The performance and progress of English language learners is a high priority for the school. Close monitoring takes place in all subject areas enhanced by the variety of groups in place such as bi-lingual classes, literacy support and transition classes. The instructional support service keeps detailed, individualized records of the performance and progress of special education students. Use is made of Ramp-up to develop literacy, which results in a high level of performance monitoring. The school can now see a marked improvement in the progress of English language learners and special education students. Very effective systems are in place to help staff understand and use data including one on one support, computer labs and the creation of a student based TechSquad to support both staff and students. The progress of the lowest performing students is being carefully analyzed by ethnicity, gender and other potential sub-groups. The school intends to maximize the use of new technology to obtain a more exact analysis of the performance of these groups to plan for further improvement.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is outstanding.**

The Comprehensive Education Plan is the culmination of a very effective and highly collaborative goal-setting process, which results in the whole-school community having a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve. The school uses its analysis of data to form whole school goals that align with the Network and the Chancellor’s goals. Each department articulates its own goals. Faculty meetings break this down further to develop instructional models and strategies to differentiate actions to meet specific needs. Very good use is made of “decision sheets” which record what the decision is, who needs to take action, when it will take place and what evidence will be demonstrated. The whole-school focus on literacy development and on differentiated instruction, for example, is evident throughout the school. An important feature of the school is its focus on finding ways to support students who need the most help. Administration has a clear understanding of the need to provide personal support as well as academic, recognizing the correlation between effective social skills and academic success. Very effective use is made of guidance counselors to deliver social skills guidance lessons to support English language learners, special education students and freshmen in literacy. The fifth year program, at a local hospital, supports older students who did not graduate in grade 12 to achieve a high school diploma without losing self-esteem. Students are proud of their peer mediation service that trains them to support and mediate each other. Large numbers of students are involved in the student organization and senior council and contribute to the achievement of goals. Very good

use is made of student planners, faculty and staff handbooks and numerous school policies to set and reinforce high expectations. Guidance counselors and grade advisers hold programming and progress interviews with students each term to identify strengths and areas for improvement and communicate the result to parents. Parents receive newsletters each month and are actively encouraged to provide information by the parent coordinator. Students respond very well to this level of support and interest in their individual progress as reflected in the comment, "This really feels like a small school where everyone knows you".

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

The school provides a very strong core curriculum supported by an outstanding range of electives and other programs. The strength and sheer variety of the curriculum has resulted in a high level of student engagement. Senior staff and faculty are continually striving to improve this, working closely with teachers to look specifically at teaching methods to engage those students who are most difficult to reach. It has worked relentlessly to ensure students have good skills in literacy and numeracy, including school-wide policies, to support their work across the curriculum. Thirteen double period classes facilitate the delivery of "Ramp-up" to freshmen scoring low levels on English language arts, and the school puts a strong emphasis on vocabulary and literacy across all content areas. Students with similar scores in math receive instruction in reduced size classes and varying levels of Math A, Math B and integrated algebra accommodate the needs of all students. This has been pivotal in improving the performance of these students. The school recognizes the importance of linking subjects to enhance understanding. Examples include integrated health and physical education topics and the alignment of literature to the social studies curriculum. "*The Pilot*", a school newspaper, and "*The Anchor*", a literary and art magazine, are good examples of cross-curricular collaboration. The breadth of the programs offered is remarkable. Teachers' willingness to respond to students' interests and give their time to run clubs makes a significant impact on the level of trust and respect evident throughout the school. The science department offers 17 advanced electives from oceanography to emergency medical techniques. Music offers three levels of concert band, two levels of marching band, two levels of chorus as well as two orchestras and a jazz band. Students have the opportunity to take part in two fully staged productions each year as well as a multitude of successful sports teams and the First Army JROTC Unit, for example. The school uses data to inform and differentiate instruction at every level, beginning with programming through to very regular testing. The extent of group work and detailed lesson planning highlight this.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

The strong instructional leadership and the daily involvement of the principal and assistant principals in this aspect of the school's work are at the heart of its success.

Their rigorous monitoring and high expectations have brought about a climate of commitment to improvement. They hold monthly meetings to review the data from a teacher-by-teacher analysis of the progress students are making and the information collected from walkthroughs, which are formal and structured. This leads to the sharp identification of the professional needs of teachers and the design of effective development activities. Teachers make regular use of lesson plans and there are shared pro-formas for lesson observations, which identify precise skills. These systems are exceptionally well developed. They have resulted in a range of observation sheets for different departments and classes that reflect specific needs. Questions for the common framework for observation include "What did you observe? Was there evidence of planning? How are the following instructional strategies in evidence? Was there evidence of good classroom management? How is student learning measured?" The high priority given to this work is evident in the time the cabinet devote to regular shared observation of demonstration lessons. For example, an assistant principal identifies a teacher, the whole cabinet observes using agreed pro-formas, and they give feedback to the teacher and engage in discussion about what they observed. Intervisitation is commonplace and a regular feature of the way in which departments contribute to the very effective support for new teachers. The school has developed a very strong range of partnerships to support instruction such as the St Johns University High School Extension program in second languages and sponsorship for the Virtual Enterprise programs from Deloitte and Touche and Tanyseebert. The school is a very well ordered community, where students want to be. Given the level of overcrowding, the climate for learning and the smooth, orderly running of the school are outstanding.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

The school's structures and systems for evaluating progress and its capacity to regroup and adapt plans quickly are highly effective. Underpinning this is a reflective community committed to revising plans to make sure they work. All staff are involved in developing the school's priorities as defined in the Comprehensive Education Plan. Each area of administration and supervision reviews its achievement as well as student performance on tests for each marking period, semi-annually and annually. Plans are broken down into detailed actions used to determine success. Each department then has its own specific goals that are broken down. Decision sheets determine the time frames and the evidence needed to determine success. The cabinet, through observation described earlier, play a major role in measuring the effectiveness of the implementation of plans and interventions and the extent of their impact. The assistant principals for organization, and technology and programming, are exceptionally adept at making strategic changes that will make an impact at classroom level. A recent analysis of the second marking period is already showing significant improvement in the performance of students in the collaborative team teaching and reduced size math classes. Formal evaluations take place in meetings of the cabinet, departments, faculty, parent teacher association, and the assistant principals mid and end of year evaluations with the principal. This information is central to the development of plans for the subsequent school year by the school leadership team. All members of the community share the vision for "excellence in education", which is modeled by the informed and determined leadership of the principal.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Fort Hamilton High School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				X	

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

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?					X
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?					X
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?					X
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?					X
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				X	

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?					X
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?					X
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?					X
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?					X
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>					X

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?					X
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?					X
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?					X
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?					X
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?					X
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>					<b>X</b>

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?					X
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					X
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?					X
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?					X
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					X
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?					X
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?					X
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?					X
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?					X
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?					X
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to make strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?					X
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan's interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?					X
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>