



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Jamaica High School

High School 470

**167-01 Gothic Drive
Queens
NY 11432**

Principal: Walter Acham

Dates of review: May 14 - 15, 2008

Lead Reviewer: George Wallace

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Jamaica High School is a high school with 1709 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 59% Black, 18% Hispanic, 1% White, and 22% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 83.4%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides positive leadership and good support throughout the school.
- The school runs smoothly and students' behavior and relationships are good allowing them to work diligently and cooperatively in lessons.
- The newly introduced attendance policies are working effectively such that in the short term, lateness by students has been halved and attendance is improving.
- The principal collects, understands and uses a wide range of very useful data.
- The school successfully identifies student groups and provides well for them as specific focus groups, for example, students at risk and those with low reading skills.
- The school has an extremely broad range of programs, including sports and the arts, which are valued by students and are matched well to specific interests and needs.
- Parents feel welcomed, value the open door policy and pleased that they receive a wide range of communications including information on their child's achievements.
- Whole school goals are clear, measurable and are central to the principal's vision.

What the school needs to improve

- Considerably sharpen the departmental goal setting process so that goals focus on specific aspects for departmental improvement and are measurable, achievable and time-related with interim evaluation points.
- Continue to develop teachers' understanding of the importance and value of differentiation in their planning and instruction to help raise student achievement.
- Continue to develop all teachers' understanding of the value of data analysis so that instruction more closely meets the needs of each student.
- Improve the consistency of teachers' use of goal setting for individual students both at the macro level for the whole course and in terms of next steps learning.
- Devise a system to ensure that all teachers have easy access to the goals and next steps as recorded in the individual education plans of special education students.
- Continue to search for procedures and actions that will improve student attendance.

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 proficient.

On joining the school, the new principal quickly recognized that some key changes were required to ensure that the school began to improve. This resulted in the setting of some core goals to raise attendance, decrease lateness, increase safety and widen the range of teaching strategies through teachers' use of data. The first three have been met and early successes are being built upon. The use of data to aid improvements in teaching and learning is having an impact with exemplary pockets of practice but there are also many areas in which little attention is given to the use of data as a tool for planning, goal setting and differentiating instruction. Short and long term goals are rarely set by teachers for individuals or their classes as a whole. Consequently, there are no interim points in the year when goals are formally evaluated.

The school is working hard to overcome what the school community state is a misplaced and unfair reputation. An example of the conscientious approach of many students is the production of a high-quality Jamaica High School newspaper, known as *The Hilltopper*. Students feel safe at school and feel that the environment for learning, while varied across the school, is improving. The school has a wide range of data and the principal has good systems to manipulate data. However, the impact of data analysis training on teachers' use of data for planning varies enormously. Few teachers use student performance data to set students learning goals. An example of where goals are in place but not used in a consistent way are those written into students' individual education plans. The school runs smoothly and students' behavior and relationships are good and they work diligently and cooperatively in lessons. Senior leaders frequently visit lessons, but feedback is conducted differently across all departments. The school has an extremely broad curriculum and students value the choices they have and courses are matched well to specific interests and needs. The inquiry team has a focus on grade 9 students and its work is showing positive results. Departmental improvement planning and goal setting is weak and there are no evaluation points where interim evaluations are made to the department. The school has made good progress on the areas for improvement identified in the last report.

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 proficient.

The school collects a wide range of relevant and useful student performance data. The

principal is acutely aware of each student's personal profile and academic performance through the use of a comprehensive data spreadsheet which allows for refined levels of searching for different patterns and trends. The use of data across the school varies considerably, from those teachers who rarely interpret achievement data, to those who fully understand the power of data for planning for students' needs. There is also variation in the detail with which assistant principals of subject departments use performance data with their teams of teachers. Data on special education students is securely managed. While it is up to date, teachers do not have easy access to the goals on the individual education plans. Pupil personnel team members know the background data on students well. However, it is not routine for teachers to use their own data when formally meeting with this team to support their recommendation of a student for interventions. Data on English language learners is principally kept through State test results. This, and additional data, is current and provides staff with knowledge of students' proficiency allowing ease of transfer to a different class. Senior leaders know to look for patterns and trends in the data they hold. For example, comparisons of achievement based on gender and ethnicity are discussed, and other scenarios include the identification of those students who are falling behind in different subjects in their scores and credits. Item analysis is stronger across the school than understanding of patterns and trends. The measurement and analysis of performance over time is in its infancy, although all of the data is available to departmental leaders. Although there is little attention paid to comparing this school's performance data with other high schools, the principal and departmental leaders have started to make, and encourage colleagues to make, visits to other schools. The biggest impact of data analysis over the past 12 months has been in relation to raising attendance and reducing lateness. Teachers have received training in the use of data as a tool for tracking performance and to inform planning, but the practice of using data to differentiate planning and teaching is new.

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 proficient.

The frequency and extent of collaboration between teachers and students varies considerably. Some teachers, especially those who use data, set clear next steps for students' learning and revisit these periodically during the school year. However, most teachers discuss over-arching goals at the beginning of the school year with their classes and relate these to school rules. While the principal has the capacity to identify and sort groups of students to produce specific focus groups, the main areas of focus are two-fold. Firstly, those students presented by teachers to the pupil personnel team for potential intervention strategies, and secondly the work of the inquiry team. The work of the latter group has been focused around the use of Scantron to improve reading and their positive results will be used to increase the use of technology for poorer readers. The school recognizes other groups that are in need of improvement and, as well as a broad intervention program, revisions to the students' schedules have led to increased variety and concentrated support through programs such as Ramp Up for English language arts. The core goals since the new principal joined the school last year are well known to staff. While teachers support these goals, which are about setting the right tone throughout the school, many teachers' expectations are not high enough although some are exemplary. Parents are now supportive of the school. They value the openness of the school, love magnificence of the building and its setting, and receive

plenty of information from the school about what is happening at school as well as information about their child's progress.

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 proficient.

The school collects data from a variety of sources, including formal periodic tests, teachers' assessments and various computer-based programs, which is useful for tracking student progress. The curriculum is broad, offering many Regents courses and a wide range of electives including arts programs. Some students take college credit courses and other programs such as law and business which can lead to internships. The school has an improving citizenship program and a wide range of extra-curricular activities including an extensive sports program. Teachers provide safe learning environments and are accountable for students' academic, personal and social development. The learning environment in hallways and most classrooms is satisfactory, but exemplary in some rooms. Students recognize and accept the wide range of learning experiences arising from different styles of teaching. Most teaching is highly didactic and many students "switch off," while in other lessons engagement is high with students involved in a variety of hands-on activities that are differentiated to meet individual needs. Student surveys of subject preferences are used in scheduling to promote good attendance and reduce lateness. Data use has also led other intelligent scheduling decisions to be made to benefit specific groups of students. Assistant principals work closely with teachers in their departments to help ensure that there is a strong commitment to the school's mission. School finance has been targeted on specific groups of students to reduce class sizes. Students like their school and feel that the external community's perception of the school is misplaced. The school has a positive atmosphere and at changeover times while the hallways are naturally busy, students feel safe. Classrooms are places of respect and trust, although students indicate that the extent of such varies according to the teacher. This year, apart from a significant investment in safety measures there have been great strides made in stemming the very poor attendance. Attendance is still too low, however, data does show that it is improving.

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 proficient.

Senior leaders use frequent observations of lessons to gauge the nature of teaching. However, more recently, although not consistent throughout the school, lesson observations have focused on the effectiveness of students' learning to identify progress in lessons. Such information is providing senior staff with invaluable information about student engagement and issues of differentiation. Discussions with teachers reveal a wide range of inconsistent practice in the use of data to meet students' specific needs. Where differentiated learning is in place, students are highly motivated and learning is effective. In these cases students recognize that work is tailored to their levels of

understanding and additionally, in the best practice, takes account of students preferred learning styles. It is recognized that much more professional development is required on data use to aid differentiated planning and teaching. However, professional development focuses on both whole school development needs as well as well as improving the skills and knowledge of staff either through subject specific training or more general teaching issues, such as classroom management. Much of the professional development is organized and run in school using both the skills of existing teachers as well as staff turn-keying knowledge and skills acquired from recent external training. To aid staff learning in relation to the school's goals, assistant principals encourage teacher inter-visitation.

In view of falling enrollment it has been some time since the school appointed new teachers. However, formal systems are effective because all new teachers have a mentor as well as support from their subject leader. Youth development and especially guidance in the school is sound. Guidance personnel work in teams and provide support for students in need as well as the routine levels of support in terms of personal and emotional development as well as tracking academic performance. The school runs smoothly and has improved over recent months as the atmosphere through the school engenders the right attitudes for learning and success. Assistant principals, in no small way, have contributed to this by reinforcing the core goals and values of the school. The school has a suitable range of partnerships that support the school in many ways.

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 proficient.

On his arrival, the new principal quickly identified three key areas that the school needed to work on if progress was to be made in creating a positive atmosphere in which learning was at the heart of the school's activities. In two of these areas, challenging goals were set in the areas of school safety and attendance and lateness. There has been significant success in meeting these goals, however, the third, which was about pedagogy, is being progressed rather slowly. While many other goals existed, as in the Comprehensive Education Plan, these were a product of the previous administration. Attendance is rising, lateness is falling, the school is safe and strategies are in place to encourage changes to the ways in which teachers plan and teach. However, there are no interim evaluation points in place and therefore neither individual departments nor the principal for the school are able to present an evaluative commentary on where the school is at in relation many of the goals that are departmental or whole school. Therefore, no matter the level within the school there is no evidence that the school is formally measuring the effectiveness of its plans or interventions for students. Periodic assessments are used, though there is inconsistent use of the resultant data for making revisions to plans that teachers or departments may have. Senior leaders track Acuity data but there is little strategic thinking through the subjects. Department planning and goal setting is weak. However, the principal has a vision for the school's development not least to benefit students through the establishment of small learning communities and to continue to work to fortify the positive profile of the school in the community.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Jamaica High School	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, 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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			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 and tardiness?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

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, and effectively address discipline related incidents?			X		
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					
			X		

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 makes 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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					
			X		

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped