



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

John Adams High School

High School 480

**101- 01 Rockaway Boulevard
Queens
NY 11417**

Principal: Grace Zwillenberg

Dates of review: February 11 - 13, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Roy Storrs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

John Adams is a high school with 3268 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 27% Black, 34% Hispanic, 6% White, 26% Asian and 6% students from other ethnic backgrounds. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 7.5% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 79.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 66% eligibility.

Because the number of students enrolled exceeds the capacity of the school's main building, 400 ninth graders are located in additional premises 40 blocks from the main school. One assistant principal acts as administrator for this building.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The experienced principal is dedicated to the school and has the committed support of her talented and hard-working cabinet.
- Rigorous data collection and monitoring procedures provide a thorough and constantly updated overview of the whole school's performance.
- Administration and faculty use data regularly and effectively to review students' progress and to set learning goals.
- Common planning time and dynamic teamwork ensure teachers plan together, learn from one another and make their instruction interesting.
- The "Jump Start Academy" of ninth graders in the annex, successfully managed by an assistant principal, is a thriving feature of the school.
- The core and extended curriculum balances basic skills development with opportunities for students to excel in their personal interests and develop their talents.
- The administration's classroom monitoring is rigorous and effective in identifying professional development needs and in improving instruction.
- The enthusiastic and collegial faculty works conscientiously to improve student achievement and progress.
- Students, faculty and support staff, enjoy excellent relationships which promote students' academic and personal development.
- Firmly embedded procedures ensure this large school operates smoothly and efficiently, enabling effective teaching and learning to take place.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide further training for faculty in using information technology to analyze data.
- Provide additional training so that teachers make optimum use of the electronic Smart Boards and so improve the quality of instruction even further.
- Continue to instill differentiated instruction across the school to ensure students are suitably challenged in all classrooms.
- Continue the exemplary work of the parent coordinator and the parents' association executive to further strengthen communication with parents.

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.

This is a successful, large school. The experienced principal is dedicated to the school and has the committed support of her talented and hard-working cabinet. All staff members work hard in support of their students. Rigorous data collection and analysis enable them to set appropriate learning goals for students. The principal recognizes the need to provide further training in using information technology to analyze data and in making optimum use of the recently purchased electronic Smart Boards. The cohesive faculty works collaboratively with the skilled counselors, with whom they enjoy excellent relationships, to promote students' academic and personal development. The balanced curriculum supports basic skills, and provides numerous opportunities for students to excel in their personal interests and develop their talents. While many teachers make lessons interesting through their differentiated instruction, in some classes not all students are suitably challenged. Firmly embedded procedures ensure this large school operates remarkably smoothly and efficiently, enabling most teaching and learning to be effective. Through the exemplary work of the parent coordinator and the parents' association executive, and the newly devised "parent community engagement action plan," efforts are underway to further strengthen communication with parents. The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous report. Computer-assisted learning is in more frequent use, and expectations regarding behavior in school are clear. The underperformance of African-American boys as well as unsatisfactory attendance issues have been, and are continuing to be, addressed. The inquiry team has made a good start in researching issues surrounding 15 grade 9 students from the lowest third of performers. Their data has been analyzed, and ways of raising achievement discussed.

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.

The administration's rigorous collection of external data and generation of the schools' own data is painstakingly maintained by one of the assistant principals, who serves as the data specialist. The process is effective in providing a thorough and constantly updated overview of performance at whole school level, and is deeply embedded within each department. The process begins with detailed analysis of data from the feeder middle schools, which identifies that all but a handful of eighth graders are achieving at level 1 or level 2. This presents a challenge to the school but upon enrollment, focused, in-school assessments in all subjects provide more specific data. These thorough procedures ensure students are placed in classes that match their needs, and that any additional

support is accurately targeted. For instance, English language learners are grouped according to their skill levels; regular testing tracks their progress, supporting many to become fluent in a short time. Data collection on special education students is equally meticulous, leading to precisely worded and effective individual education plans.

While celebrating the cultural richness of the student population, the school looks closely at achievement by gender and ethnicity to determine any issues. This analysis has disclosed that, while there are more male than female students, a larger number of females graduate, and Black males are the lowest performers. These issues have been addressed in part by establishing a men's club and as a result the number of suspensions has decreased dramatically. Firmly established systems ensure that performance is compared year on year to identify trends. While there have been fluctuations in some subjects, the number of students graduating has increased encouragingly. The principal is diligent in comparing this school with similar schools, although there are few schools of this size with a similar student population. All teachers have received professional development in using data, but the principal recognizes the need to provide further training in using information technology to analyze data, and in making optimum use of the recently purchased electronic resources.

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 well developed.

Collaboration begins with the school leadership team revising the Comprehensive Education Plan to set new goals based on additional current data. The principal and cabinet analyze the data further to refine the goals, and make strategic decisions at whole-school level. Subsequently, the principal meets with each assistant principal to determine personal goals. Armed with spreadsheets of data including City, State and internal test scores for each student, and with their personal goals in mind, the assistant principals work with the subject or specialist teams they supervise. Thus, each department sets challenging goals coupled with definite time scales. This filters down to individual teachers setting learning goals for students in their classes. Students also take part in the planning process by assessing themselves using student reflection and action plans but as yet, do not set their own precise short-term learning goals. Common planning time, which enables teachers to plan and set goals together, and dynamic teamwork are key factors in the school's success. This is illustrated by improving graduation rates and the focused support given to underachieving and special education students, who have subsequently made good progress. The principal's advisory team adds another dimension to the picture, as it includes representatives from all facets of the school's operation, so that everyone is moving in the same positive direction.

The progressive team structure is one valuable way in which school goals are filtered through to staff and students. In spite of the school's numerous ways of communicating with parents, including a splendid newspaper, parental response continues to be a disappointment to the school. Through the exemplary work of the parent coordinator and the parents' association executive, and the newly devised "parent community engagement action plan", a concerted effort is underway to further strengthen communication with parents.

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 well developed.

The school’s extensive and varied curriculum, including an interdisciplinary approach which is improving students’ literacy skills across the curriculum, caters to the diverse needs of its students. The school’s annex, which is effectively managed by an assistant principal, features the “Jump Start Academy” for 400 general education ninth grade students that has become a thriving feature of the school. At the other end of the scale, the well attended, after school “Young Adult Borough Center” helps older students, who might otherwise drop out of school, to earn a high school diploma. Its large size enables the school to offer students numerous exciting activities, including visual and performing arts, a United Nations team, and dental hygiene. Of the 28 sports teams, the soccer and football teams have recently won the city league championships. In these ways, the core and extended curriculum balances basic skills development with opportunities for students to excel in their personal interests. The enthusiastic and collegial teachers are conscious of their responsibilities. They learn from one another, and work hard to improve student achievement and progress by making their instruction interesting. While instruction is differentiated in many classrooms, in others, lessons do not suitably challenge all students.

The school’s budget, staffing and scheduling procedures are stretched to the limit by having to maintain two buildings 40 blocks apart. Yet, within these constraints, the principal’s prudent management ensures that students’ needs are always given the highest priority. A recent valuable initiative has been the purchase of electronic whiteboards. While these are in regular use, their full potential is not yet being fully realized, as teachers are still becoming familiar with them. Systems ensure staff know and nurture their students, resulting in a strong sense of trust and respect between them. The school continues its unyielding focus on improving attendance by using numerous strategies, such as requiring good attendance as one criterion for playing in a sports team.

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 well developed.

As part of their commitment to raising standards of teaching, the principal and assistant principals make regular classroom observations based on the California standards. Such observations are often undertaken in pairs to focus on subject content and broader pedagogical issues. These rigorous procedures are effective in identifying professional development needs and in improving instruction. A considerable volume of professional development is provided by assistant principals, through the knowledge network and in the in-house “Teachers’ Center”, with the common theme of training teachers to be leaders. In addition, teachers improve their subject knowledge by attending conferences organized by outside training providers, often as a whole department to establish a sense of unity and community. Regular opportunity to observe their colleagues’ classrooms, sometimes in other departments, is a strong feature of the school’s program of improving instruction. Beyond the thorough systems of formal and informal mentoring, the whole staff is very supportive towards new colleagues, as they consider themselves to be part of the John Adams family.

The team of guidance counselors, who work collaboratively with teachers, use their various specialist skills daily in the challenging task of helping students make the most of their time in school. Students, faculty and support staff, enjoy excellent relationships that actively promote students' academic and personal development. The student government plays a valuable role within the school. Its members are mature and proactive in supporting fellow students, for instance by acting as peer mediators to resolve issues. Firmly embedded procedures ensure this large school operates remarkably smoothly and efficiently, enabling effective teaching and learning to take place. Numerous links with outside groups and agencies benefit students and teachers. The principal is now hoping to attract a business partner prepared to provide mentors for those students who would benefit from being able to chat regularly with a trusted adult from outside the school.

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 well developed.

The principal's motto of "monitor and review" recognizes the close link between planning, goal setting and formal, ongoing monitoring procedures which enable the school to measure its success and adjust its program if necessary. The school leadership team begins the process by formulating whole school goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The reflective administration and staff continually examine data to determine the school's progress against these goals. Data, including test results, interim assessments, scrutiny of students' work, and observation of their behavior and attitudes, provides a detailed knowledge of all students. The principal has high expectations of her cabinet and staff, whom she empowers to do their jobs and be part of the rigorous monitoring regime. The enthusiastic, collegial teachers are fully aware of their personal accountability and appreciate that classroom observation by the principal and assistant principals monitor to improve their effectiveness constantly. Teachers make optimum use of regular assessments and other information to measure the impact of their work and to revise plans accordingly. Administration maintains a firm overview by reviewing department performance and the impact of intervention programs after each of the six marking periods, and this heads the next stage of goal setting. This professional approach enables leaders and faculty to forward plan confidently for the benefit of their students. Within this successful scenario, the principal has the vision of creating a number of small learning communities, while retaining the many advantages of the school's large size.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: John Adams 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