



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Forest Hills High School

High School 440

67 – 01 110 Street

Queens

NY 11375

Principal: Saul Gootnick

Dates of review: March 18 - 20, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Forest Hills High School is a school with 3663 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 9% Black, 30% Hispanic, 36% White, and 24% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for the other 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 90%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

As you walk through the doors of Forest Hills High School, a blaze of color greets you. The splendid displays of students' artwork combined with information about their achievements and responsibilities, immediately indicate the emphasis on academic success. The school's mission, valuing the importance of students' learning, is displayed clearly. Key quotes from students, explaining, how they know they are learning, provide concrete examples of how teachers now focus on supporting students' learning journeys. Alongside these displays are the school's four key goals from the Comprehensive Educational Plan. As a result, all faculty and students understand the key areas of improvement for this academic year. In addition, all classrooms display interim goals related to all curriculum areas. These subject learning goals are understood by both students and teachers who believe this new system has brought a newfound cohesion to this large school. The school's intention is to extend these in a quantifiable way to allow all students to identify "next steps".

Students appreciate the new culture and speak proudly of the many initiatives the new principal has introduced to celebrate their achievements and talents. They acknowledge that attendance has been an issue. Because of new appointments and newly introduced procedures, parents whose first language is not English are better supported and their understanding of school life has greater clarity. Students proudly wear tee shirts, indicating their 100% attendance achievement. The significance of all staff wearing Forest Hills tee shirts visually tells students that, although the school is very large, its focus has become unified. Both staff and student attendance has improved.

The curriculum spread is vast. Students excitedly describe how their individual talents are developed. Through small academies, this very large school adds extra dimensions to core subjects and leaves students feeling very well prepared for college. Much of the work they do is planned to relate to real life situations thus increasing its relevance. The arts infuse the curriculum. Music and drama takes high priority and enable students to reach high levels of performance. Journalism is another key feature of the curriculum.

Communication is improving and the school looks forward to greater parental involvement as a consequence. There are examples where teachers effectively use data to differentiate instruction. This area of the school's work is developing and is a key area in its professional development plan. At present whole school plans are in place but teachers do not have individualized professional development plans, which relate to their individual practice.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has made many significant organizational changes, which are impacting positively on students' progress.
- Staff are conscientious in supporting students to grow academically and socially in a large learning community.
- Students welcome the breadth of curricular opportunities, which prepares them very effectively for life beyond school.
- The new emphasis on whole-school goals and subject learning goals provides clarity of focus in order to realize the school's mission and vision.
- The principal empowers students, celebrates their successes and, as a consequence, attendance is improving rapidly.
- The multi-talented inquiry team ably supports the progress of underachieving students in global history.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine the goal-setting process to include timeframes and success criteria for all strategic plans.
- Share good practice within and across departments in order to further develop differentiated planning and teaching,
- Develop teachers' individual professional development plans, including interim goals, through a consistent approach to lesson observations and work scrutiny.
- Extend the involvement of parents and families in their children's learning journey.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The introduction of data books clearly assists teachers in gaining a full and clear picture of each individual student's performance. The appointment of an assistant principal with responsibility for data has made a positive significant change on teachers' understanding of data, related to the whole child. Significant new processes are in place to record and monitor student attendance. Perfect attendance is celebrated and students receive tee shirts acknowledging their success. They wear these with pride and clearly explain how the electronic entry system does not allow any cutting of classes. Because of this initiative, student attendance has risen above 90% and class cutting has diminished considerably.

Communication with parents is vastly improved. In addition to formal mailings, home teachers have parents' e-mail addresses. As a result, communications take place on a daily basis. The school is in the early stages of developing a website to extend electronic communications.

The principal meets regularly and formally with his large assistant principal team. They analyze and discuss data collected across all curriculum areas providing them with a thorough understanding of comparative subject performance. As a consequence, the administrative team has identified underachievement of Hispanic students which is being addressed and their progress is improving. The school is thus aware of the performance of sub-groups of students but, at present, this information is not shared with all members of faculty in an aggregated form. This makes it more difficult for teacher to check if every group of students is making sufficient progress. The principal works tirelessly with the physical education department and his student leadership team to address poor progress in aspects of this curriculum area.

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 new principal sees goal setting as a vital school priority. At the beginning of this academic year, faculty identified four whole-school key goals. These are articulated in the Comprehensive Educational Plan, which was developed collaboratively. The belief is that "together everyone achieves more". Faculty and students understand what the school stands for and the learning climate in the school is more positive as a consequence. Assistant principals with departmental responsibilities work collaboratively with their teams to devise interim subject goals. These are visible in all

classroom Students are able to articulate these and speak positively of the curriculum focus these give.

Individual student goals, introduced in January, provide students with an opportunity to be reflective. It is clear that common processes pertain across each student's personal schedule. At present, the goals are not sufficiently specific which leads to a lack of clarity. This results in students aiming high, but failing to understand the specific steps they need to take in order to improve.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan includes input from faculty, parents and students. The student voice is very important to the principal as he sees students as members of a huge family where everyone's opinion is sought, listened to and valued. The student members of the school leadership Team speak with pride of their ability to be "change agents" within the school. They take their responsibilities very seriously and represent the views of the whole student body diligently.

The school sets high expectations for students, both socially and academically. The school runs smoothly and relationships are good. The school is looking creatively at ways of involving parents more actively in their children's learning and appreciates that this is a key improvement area.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

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

The school offers an extensive and challenging curriculum to its students, who speak positively about the "schools within the school". Through the small learning communities, exciting educational programs meet students' diverse needs. Students experience real life situations as part of the normal curriculum. These broaden horizons and have a positive impact. They appreciate a learning environment where the "classroom could be a hospital, a charity or debating opportunity" plus many more. Students in the health professions academy speak confidently and explain how sphygmomanometers calculate blood pressure and the differences between systole and diastole. They enjoy hospital visits and are well prepared for their chosen future careers. Research takes high priority and students produce papers of high quality in mathematics and science. The academies meet the needs of all students and, through the renaissance academy; lower achieving students receive sympathetic support in order to facilitate their transition to high school.

The arts infuse the work of the school. The school bands deliver concerts of the highest quality. Students' own compositions; graded against defined rubric, result in good individual music writing. Drama takes high priority and student performances on Broadway result in professional actors taking students' ability to a higher level. Journalism is another key feature of the curriculum. The school's newspaper is of high quality and addresses pertinent issues related to school success. One example of this is students' comments about the Learning Environment Survey. They ably address the issues and link these to the outcomes of the Progress Report. They are confident that in this academic year "all voices will be heard". This emphasis on excellence is reflected in all academies.

In many lessons, teachers now feel confident to use data to differentiate instruction. Students speak excitedly about the improvement of instruction and describe how they feel more motivated as many teachers “think outside the box”. The impact on progress is very positive. However, some teachers are reluctant to change. In their lessons, which are dominantly teacher directed, learning time is lost when able students wait for all their colleagues to complete a task. The new principal has generated additional funding in order to purchase additional resources, including SMART boards. Teachers and students use the boards imaginatively and effectively to support learning.

The whole school environment is one of care and respect. Students welcome the support they receive from teachers, saying passion for their curriculum areas positively helps motivation. In all lessons, students are respectful to each other, very willing to learn and achieve good results.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal works in close partnership with his large administrative team to establish processes to support each teacher’s professional development. While the assistant principals are eager to share effective practice and move forward collectively, their abilities as instructional leaders are variable. There are examples of exceptional practice where teachers are supported in a systematic way to reach their personal goals, but this is not consistent. This is particularly the case in giving feedback related to the scrutiny of student work. At its best, teachers use exemplary work to motivate students and carry out assessments against clearly understood rubrics. In curriculum areas where there is no common assessment system, administration makes little impact on teachers’ expectations of students and allows work of poor quality to be accepted.

The inquiry team members are from a spread of disciplines and benefit from the support of data specialists and attendance teachers. Results and methodology are shared with all faculty members, who are encouraged to incorporate successful strategies into their teaching. The inquiry team’s thorough analysis of data informs their selection of students needing support. This year’s focus is on underachieving Hispanic males who do not meet the academic standards in global history. Through staffing changes, the hundred lowest achieving students, including the selected students, were taught by three particularly effective teachers. The school celebrated a 79% pass rate in Regents in January and attributes this to breaking down all aspects of learning into small achievable steps. The school provides intensive support to those students who are still struggling, who describe how their teachers highlight key points within text. .

The principal operates in an open and transparent manner. He challenges ineffective teaching and creates more opportunities for teachers to collaborate, share practice and visit each other’s classrooms. This strategy is developing. However, there is insufficient inter- and cross-departmental observation in order to share best practice more widely.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

The school is establishing a comprehensive approach to monitoring. In addition to homeroom teachers and subject teachers, students receive additional positive support from guidance counselors, who work with them to see if they are meeting their goals. As a result, the academic and personal support for students is good. This process is being extended as, at present, evaluation points are not clearly articulated in all plans, interim goals are not set and sub-group progress is not always addressed.

Differentiation is one of the school's key issues for improvement. To tackle this, the principal encourages staff to group students related to a grid system. They use many data sources to group students according to achievement. This arrangement has made a positive start in supporting staff to address students' learning needs. Too often students engage in the same task and differentiation is by outcome alone. At present, students' preferred learning styles and differences between male and female approaches to learning are not always addressed.

The school places considerable importance on all data source outcomes. The principal has responded positively to the Progress Report and the Learning Environment Survey. Measures are in place to involve more parents and teachers the survey. The excellent school newspapers' headline, "Serious surveys: Let your voice be heard" resulted in all members of faculty, students and parents understanding that this is an important determinant of how the school is perceived by the outside world.

The school's vision is "work in progress". The aim is for "students to come together, regardless of race, religion, color or ethnicity to celebrate aspirations for the future". There is no doubt that the principal has started with members of the school community on a developmental learning journey where "dreams will become reality". All faculty and students are involved in this journey and everyone appreciates the need for a "change culture".

Members of faculty recognize students' individual talents and make effective efforts to support all students' aspirations. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the many new initiatives are beginning to impact positively on staff and student performance. The principal sees the school as an extension to his family, and his enthusiasm and focus are resulting in a rapidly improving and collaborative academic and social culture.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009 Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Forest Hills High School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		X		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?				X
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X		
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

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

<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?		X		
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key

△	Underdeveloped	▷	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed
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