

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Jamaica High School

High School 470

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

Principal: Walter Acham

Dates of review: May 5 - 7, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Candice Scott

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Jamaica High School is a high school with 1471 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 58% Black, 18% Hispanic, 1% White, and 23% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 81%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal's vision has been to recapture the school to make it a place recognized for learning. Analyzing the data regarding incident reports, the principal made it his number one priority to change the culture of the school. The challenge of changing the school's image has been fully realized by creating a shared vision with the staff and parents. Parents, teachers, and students indicate that they are pleased with the positive tone throughout the building and expectations are much higher. The mutual respect and collaboration has served to enhance the school's image. The guidance department has developed an excellent structure this year for setting and monitoring individual student goals and the effectiveness of subsequent action plans. Every student now has an individualized educational plan format which is created in collaboration with parents and a designated guidance counselor. The plan is revised at the end of each marking period to evaluate and address student progress. This system has yielded positive results in terms of involving and supporting students in improving their academic performance. As a result, this year's graduation rate is higher than last year's.

The school gathers a variety of data in all content areas, including physical education. This data is used to determine budgetary allocations and organizational structures, although not all departments share the data or use it to design detailed school-wide plans. The analysis of the performance of all subgroups is not sufficiently rigorous. As a result, there is a limited understanding and use of differentiated instruction in several content areas to support learning effectively in all lessons. The curriculum is broad and provides good supports and enrichment opportunities to enliven learning for students. The school has limited technology resources and so teachers are unable to use technology as an effective instructional tool. Students' written work in all content areas is not always scrutinized sufficiently well to ensure consistent progress in this aspect.

At present, the school does not individualize professional development. There has been a focus this year within the school to improve the use of assessment and other data to improve the differentiation of instruction for every student with some success. As yet, not all teachers enjoy common planning periods and this hinders the opportunity for teachers to share good practice and so to develop more consistency in the quality of instruction.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has been very successful in establishing a calm and respectful environment within the school, which is demonstrated through the studious climate in classrooms.
- Based upon the principal's vision for a successful learning community, the school has used data effectively to make strategic decisions about the future direction of the school.
- This school has a newly-established goal-setting system that provides students with regularly updated individualized educational plans, which include long-term and interim goals based on extensive data and collaboration with guidance counselors and parents.
- The school checks students' progress at regular checkpoints using a variety of data sources to determine areas in need of improvement and opportunities to excel.
- The principal, teachers and administration communicate high expectations to all students, particularly regarding their behavior in school.
- The curriculum is both varied and engaging providing opportunities for remediation and advanced placement classes.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop and implement individualized professional development plans and create structures in which good practice can be shared, in order to enable teachers to achieve their instructional potential.
- Improve further data collection and analysis by ensuring the consistent monitoring of student written work, and by presenting subgroup data in standardized formats that allow comparisons to be made between them.
- Develop the faculty's understanding of how to differentiate instruction and implement practice across all content areas.
- Update the teaching equipment and technology systems in classrooms to provide for even more engaging lessons for students.

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 school uses a wide range of sources, including ARIS and Acuity, to collect performance data on a regular basis and form a coherent overview of each student's progress. This results in six formal report cards and interim progress reports being issued to parents that indicate how well their children are applying themselves to their studies. At the end of each marking period, guidance counselors consult with each student to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the progress they have made and what they need to do to improve further. This year, these discussions have resulted in individualized education plans with modified goals that enable students to understand how they can improve.

The school's leaders have a general understanding of how subgroups perform in relation to one another, but they do not analyze the performance data in standardized ways to enable them to make more precise comparisons between them, or to discern trends accurately. The principal's clear understanding of the data on the school's behavioral difficulties at the time he took up his position, underpinned his clear and very successful strategy to improve the tone of the building. Special education students and English language learners are two groups for which the school analyzes data on a regular basis and uses it to enhance student progress.

The school uses its wide range of data sources to direct the design of strategies for improving student performance. All subject departments collect and communicate Acuity and ARIS data regularly and clearly to its teachers for the purpose of planning and setting goals and to monitor student performance. The extent to which teachers actually use these two and other assessments varies across content areas. For example, the math department analyzes Acuity and ARIS data, and the science department uses its own data derived from Regents reports and teacher-made assessments to determine and plan for next steps for student achievement. English language arts teachers also use ongoing data and conferencing to create differentiated instructional plans for students.

Individual teachers are improving their collection of data so that they can readily see the progress of their students. This year, teachers have developed rubrics for all content areas although not all assignments are graded with enough detail to give every student a full picture of progress and achievement. The day-to-day assessment of written work is also inconsistent across content areas and, in general, it is not scrutinized adequately to support progress in this aspect. This means that the school misses an important opportunity to develop good study habits and raise expectations by explaining to students how their written work could be better.

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 school has a newly-established goal-setting system that parallels an individualized educational plan format. Every student develops goals based on extensive data, in collaboration with the guidance counselor and their parents. The school monitors these goals every marking period to assess student progress towards graduation, and recommends students for accelerated or remedial programs based on this assessment. It then informs parents through this individualized educational plan format.

Although the school collects ARIS and Acuity data, the extent to which teachers use this information in creating differentiated profiles that inform differentiated instruction for every student varies across classes and subjects. This inconsistency of analysis results in a disparity in instructional delivery. Some teachers, such as in English language arts and math faculty are clearly addressing the needs of their students through ongoing assessments, while others are only using the Regents and grade reports. At present, the school does not conduct professional development to train teachers to use data to provide differentiated instruction.

The school leadership team utilized data collected from all subject areas, as well as longitudinal studies to develop action plans which include measurable improvement goals. Parents indicate that they participate in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan, and that they receive periodic updates at school leadership team meetings.

The principal, parents, and teachers communicate high expectations to students particularly concerning their behavior in school. They thoroughly analyze behavior and attendance data, establish school-wide goals for improvement and challenge students to meet the targets. Display boards and special events celebrate student achievement and promote high expectations.

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 proficient.

The school provides a wide variety of courses. Engaging students through robotics, visual arts, African American Studies, and advanced placement courses allows the school to meet all of the students’ curriculum learning needs. The principal, teachers, and administration communicate high expectations for all students, especially for behavior and conduct. Students conduct community service work to improve the neighborhood through clean-up projects, tutoring elementary students, and assisting at senior citizen centers. English language arts and math teachers conference with students on an ongoing basis. These teachers make decisions for next steps to improve student performance on the basis of the conferencing assessments. The school leaders plan to create a year-long map of the instructional program in order to spread this consistency across all content areas.

The assistant principal of organization allocates funds based on the school-wide goals and adopted improvement initiatives. Technology is somewhat limited throughout the building due to budgetary cutbacks and so teachers cannot use this valuable resource to enliven instruction in all classes. School safety is clearly a priority that the school has addressed successfully. The principal has been very successful in establishing a calm and respectful environment within the school, which is demonstrated through the studious climate in the classrooms. While the individualized educational plans effectively inform additional interventions and enrichment programs, some teachers are still developing their skills in using this data and more detailed rubrics to fully differentiate learning for all students in their lessons.

The school has used the attendance and lateness data effectively to improve the tone of the building and, as a result, the school reflects a positive atmosphere for learning. Character education is not a separate subject, but it is infused throughout all curriculum areas. Teachers demonstrate a high level of respect for students, administration, and their colleagues. Students in turn are respectful and eager learners. They walk through the halls quietly, and arrive at their classes on time. Parents state that they feel welcome in the school, and that teachers are very concerned about students. Parents also praise the work of the guidance counselors in helping students make the best curriculum and scheduling decisions. The school conducts workshops for parents that provide good advice on how to manage adolescent behaviors. The scores based on parent responses to the Learning Environment Survey have improved slightly over the previous year, although the number of parents taking the survey is still relatively low. Student, parent, and teacher responses to the survey are all average and above.

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 school has inconsistent systems for promoting each teacher's professional growth. Department chairpersons encourage teachers to visit each other's classes to spread and promote the implementation of best instructional practices and so to improve the effectiveness of teaching. Teachers who attend workshops then turnkey what they have learned during professional development sessions. A collegiality within departments successfully promotes professional enhancement. However, there is no formal structure designed to address the professional development needs of each individual teacher. Although part of the school's improvement plan, common planning periods are not regularly scheduled for all teachers and so missed opportunities exist for them to share successful instructional strategies. As a result, there is inconsistency in teachers' instructional practice and, in particular, their ability to use available data to differentiate their instruction.

Teachers are encouraged to participate in the work of the inquiry team. The inquiry team has selected students who are English language learners from earth science classes as the target for their study. They have investigated the language difficulties based on the data from the home language survey and the New York State English language arts learning style surveys and encouraged teachers to implement visual learning strategies. The administration is using the results of these investigations to make decisions for school-wide improvement. Purchasing visual aids to promote vocabulary development was initiated as a result of this investigation.

This school collaborates with community-based organizations to enrich student learning experiences and provide opportunities for them to do community service and participate in an after-school program.

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.

Based upon the principal's vision for a successful learning community, the school has used data effectively to make strategic decisions about its future direction. In response to the monitoring of the school's instructional practices through the progress report, teacher observations, and subject walkthroughs, school leaders restructure the organization at regular intervals to provide maximum effectiveness. The school has determined that in order to enhance student performance it is necessary to move to a year-long evaluation system in which the same teacher would teach a student for two semesters. A detailed plan outlines how teachers will be given the skills to monitor student progress more effectively and improve and maintain consistency of instruction. Through data analysis, the school determined that approximately 18 instructional hours could be better utilized through this change in programming. The school is also planning to implement common planning periods within subject areas to help monitor and plan consistently for student progress. Teachers and guidance counselors work collaboratively and use the information from the interim and six formal progress reports to monitor and discuss students' progress and suggest strategies for improvement. English language arts and math teachers use interim assessments as benchmarks to build and adjust instruction and programs for supporting student progress.

All assistant principals have adopted the principal's vision for a successful learning community. They are beginning to share collected subject data to better formulate school-wide plans for academic improvement. The school leadership team monitors the goals and strategies detailed in the Comprehensive Educational Plan on a regular basis at meetings. The school leadership team plans to use the analysis from the shared collected data to develop action plans aimed at establishing greater consistency in the quality of instruction and so fulfill the school's vision for a successful learning community.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Jamaica High School	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+
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, DYQ, 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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed