



**Department of  
Education**

*Joel I. Klein, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Richmond Hill High School**

**High School 475**

**89-30 114<sup>th</sup> Street**

**Queens**

**NY 11418**

**Principal: Frances DeSanctis**

**Dates of review: April 30 - May 4, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Barry King**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Richmond Hill is a high school with 3,295 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 15% Black, 48% Hispanic, 3% White, and 31% Asian students. Almost 3% are not categorized by ethnicity. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 79.2%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school is overcrowded and has 22 classrooms in trailers, with no direct access to them from the main building.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The school is in the process of making radical changes in the way it gathers and uses data to raise student performance. The catalyst was the disappointing grade that it received in its NYC progress report in 2008. The principal led the strategy for improvement by making all stakeholders aware of the situation and identifying what needs to be done to move forward. The goals in the new Comprehensive Education Plan are very clearly linked to the issues raised by the progress report.

Much improved systems for collecting and analyzing data are now in place, accompanied by the regular practice of setting goals for both student achievement and staff development. Students speak confidently about how they assess their progress and set new goals for themselves, although the precision with which this is done varies between subjects. The curriculum is flexibly adjusted to meet students' needs and provides a wide range of electives, and revisions are underway to ensure that assessment criteria are clearer. Teachers say that using data to differentiate work has become a "mindset", which represents a considerable shift from a short while ago, although skills in executing differentiated instruction remain very uneven. The school endeavors to raise student expectations in a number of ways, but they are not consistently conveyed through the correction of written work. The school has a climate in which students feel safe and generally engage with their work, although pockets of weaker teaching and limitations in modern teaching equipment restrain their interest and progress.

The school believes it is "putting things in place for future success", as one assistant principal aptly phrased the improvement process. The leadership of the school has been skilful in utilizing its extensive arrangements for professional development to ensure that the faculty are motivated to contribute to the mission of improving the school's performance. Modest improvements in student outcomes have already been recorded this year, although there remains some way to go to reach the school's goals. An underlying problem that dampens so many of the school's efforts to raise achievement and graduation is the continuing high level of absence, which despite considerable effort, is only slowly reducing.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Based on data relating to its recent performance, the principal has led the school effectively in making well-judged strategic decisions to improve.
- The school has developed very effective systems for analyzing data on a frequent basis and communicating the results to staff, students and families.
- The staff's professional development is well supported by the many opportunities for collaboration and the process of setting individual development goals.
- The school has well-established procedures for student goal-setting, which involve students in assessing their progress and articulating their next steps for learning.
- The curriculum provides flexible pathways to students as they move through the school, providing them with a good range of courses.
- For the most part, the school has a culture of mutual trust and respect, and students show good attitudes to their work.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to work with all constituents, including parents, to make significant improvements in attendance.
- Improve the quality of teaching by extending the use of differentiated instruction, acquiring more modern technology such as smart boards and computers, and remediating the pockets of weak teaching that fail to engage students.
- Raise the quality and regularity of the assessment of written work so that it consistently conveys high expectations in terms of academic rigor and presentation.
- Use the good practice within the school to ensure that student goals are more consistently specific and measurable.

## 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 has made considerable progress during this academic year in the generation and analysis of data, helped greatly by the well-judged appointment of two assistant principals to lead in this work. The school now collates data on each student across the range of the subjects that they take, to provide an overview of each one's performance at the time of the six marking periods and the six intervening progress reports. The data is collated to show the progress of most subgroups, with particular and appropriate emphasis on the achievement of the lowest third of students. Through this process, students and parents have regular checkpoints to indicate the progress that each student is making. In addition to the provision of twelve student reports per year, the school makes contact with parents on a regular basis as and when necessary, for example by telephone or email, something that they much appreciate. Each class teacher keeps a binder for their students, evidence that the school's drive to ensure that data underpins instruction is increasingly effective. As one teacher commented, "I have been educated tremendously this year in using data."

The school uses a wide range of standardized systems, such as Acuity, to generate data to measure student progress, but the ongoing assessment of written work is less secure. In some classes, teachers regularly mark work in a way that makes it clear how well the student has achieved and what is necessary to improve, but in others marking is irregular or unhelpful. The school is very alert to the low overall attendance which, despite some improvement this year, is still well below its stated goal of 90%.

**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 been successful in developing a goal-setting culture within the school, and staff and students are now very familiar with the procedures. After each report card and progress report, students' self-assess their progress and set revised goals for the coming month that are monitored by their teachers. The administration has given responsibility to subject leaders and staff to develop their own processes, and some subjects have developed good practice. For example, in social studies, one student noted that he had achieved in the range 65-69% in the previous marking period and his goal was to reach 75% in the next. Another had achieved 90% and recorded a goal of pushing this up to 95%. Such precise and differentiated goals are not yet common across the school, as they often consist of desires to improve general work habits, for example by completing more homework or being more punctual. While such goals are

undoubtedly important, they do not provide students with a way of measuring whether they are successful academically. Staff also evaluate their own performance and indicate how they would like to develop their skills; they then identify the training goals necessary to do so.

The school's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) has been put together through a collaborative process that has been driven by the principal. Through assemblies for students and parents, a range of meetings with staff and other means, all stakeholders have been made aware of the need to improve student outcomes and these have been crystallized in the plan's goals. These goals are very clear and specific, and are adjusted in the light of ongoing data. For example, the goal to increase the percentage of students achieving at least 10 credits in their third year was raised in the light of half-yearly outcomes. As the principal said, "This is the first time the CEP has become a living document!"

The school endeavors to instill high expectations in the students through a range of methods, which include posting whole-school goals in the hallways and the well-organized work of the guidance counselors. However, the tolerance by many teachers of poor presentation, and low levels of academic rigor in written work means that students often do not know well enough how to improve or what good work looks like. Increasingly, rubrics are used to indicate how improvement can be made but this is not consistent across the school. At the same time, first-rate practice exists within the school with, for example, a rubric in one subject for the way that work is organized and presented. This innovation has led, where applied, to far better preparation for both examinations and independent lifelong learning.

**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 flexible curriculum for students, who move between subjects as and when they achieve their credits. Being a large school, it is able to offer a wide range of electives, such as Advanced Placement courses in most subjects and college-level courses taught by college staff. It is currently working through a program of curricular renewal, to ensure that skills and assessment criteria are clearly identified, as well as the content to be covered. The school has made significant progress across all subjects in helping teachers understand the importance of differentiating learning activities and how they might do this. Good practice is growing. For example, in a math lesson on multiplication, students worked in four groups with tasks at different levels of difficulty, while in an English lesson on Macbeth, students in groups were given tasks at three levels of challenge in summarizing the plot. The school is thus well positioned to increase the extent of differentiation but, as the principal recognizes, roughly half the staff do not yet have sufficient competence in planning differentiated instruction.

The school has carefully allocated its resources to meet its needs, as shown in the appointment of the two data assistant principals and the good teacher/student ratio maintained in the collaborative team teaching classes. Leaders have latterly begun to recognize how modern technology can interest and engage students in their learning, and it has recently acquired 12 additional smart boards. There remain many lessons where the learning is much less exciting than it might be as the teaching equipment is old, with some classes still having chalkboards in use. The school's monitoring of

classroom teaching indicates that a small group of teachers need considerable support if they are to provide their students with an acceptable standard of education.

The culture of the school is good, with mutual trust and respect evident among students and staff. For example, when students are invited to speak in class they are usually heard with courtesy and attention. Despite the high level of suspensions, students say that they feel safe in the school and that bullying is not a recurrent problem for them. The students' positive attitudes and the significant moves by the school towards data-driven instruction have begun to lead to encouraging improvements in performance, for example in the rate of credit accumulation. The level of absence, which is often beyond the power of school to affect as it is frequently condoned or ignored by parents, is a major factor in restricting the school's more rapid improvement.

**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's professional development programs have been very well directed at its overarching priorities over the past year. This has involved making the whole staff fully aware of the weaknesses displayed in its last progress report and building the staff's capacity to use data to set goals and improve instruction. While this is still work in progress, teachers testify to the extent that their professional capabilities have been expanded. The teachers' personal goals generally link in with the school's central priorities. The school makes good use of external courses and the expertise within its own ranks. For example, teachers facilitate study sessions for others, as seen in a thoughtful early morning cross-curricular session on how to differentiate instruction. The collaborative culture that is much appreciated by the staff is encouraged by multiple opportunities to meet in common planning time or study forums. The impact of this was seen in the work of the inquiry team in 2007-08, which led to a school-wide initiative to improve students' vocabulary; this year the two inquiry teams have been slower to implement their strategies. The administration has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching through its program of lesson visiting, although the frequency of snapshot visits is less than that found in many schools.

The case load of guidance counselors was recently reduced from 400 to 300 to give them more capacity to help students, which they do through regular meetings. Where necessary, they make generally successful invitations to parents to come to school conferences. It has, however, proved difficult to create strong ongoing partnerships with parents, for example to enlist their support in boosting student attendance.

**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 data systems now in operation provide the school with a constantly updated overview of each student's progress, which is the basis for the setting and revision of their goals. Weaknesses persist in the specificity of goals in some areas, and in the quality of ongoing classroom assessment to monitor progress on a day-to-day basis. The school's self-evaluation of its overall performance has been frank and the messages have been well communicated to stakeholders. On the basis of this, the school has set

itself ambitious but necessary goals to redress the recent slippage in its performance. The administration constantly scrutinizes the data on student performance to see whether it is on track to meet its goals and, in the light of interim assessments, to adjust them accordingly. It is well aware, for example, of the current and expected rates of credit accumulation and graduation, disaggregated into subgroups. The figures show that there are green shoots of improvement, particularly among the lowest third of students, but the overall outcomes and attendance levels have been slower to respond and the school is likely to fall short of its intentions this year.

The progress report galvanized the principal and her senior team to make radical changes in the school's performance, and key strategic decisions have been based firmly upon what the data demonstrated. An important part of the strategy for improvement has been the successful enlisting of the professional support of the staff in a common mission to ensure that, in the various teams through which they work, they can contribute to the school's improvement. The sharpness of the goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan means that the school has clear criteria against which to measure its success.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Richmond Hill High School</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				<b>X</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### 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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed