

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**John Adams High School**

**High School 480**

**101-02 Rockaway Boulevard  
Ozone Park  
NY 11417**

**Principal: Grace Zwillenberg**

**Dates of review: December 10- 12, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

John Adams High School has an enrolment of 3375 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 30% Black, 35% Hispanic, 5% White, 26% Asian and 4% multi-racial students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 7.7% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 80%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 65.7% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The school is well led by an able administration team. The school faculty is increasingly promoting the vision of small learning communities. Collaboration and support are positive features of the school. The development of inter-disciplinary courses and new assessment processes, including progress reports, are enabled through the commitment of all members of the school community. The work of the school is efficiently promoted through a variety of contexts such as the Inquiry Teams. Developing open communication with parents is high on the school's agenda. To this end, parents and students are made aware of the relevant expectations the school has in relation to attendance, behavior and academic performance. The school has effectively established a range of procedures for communicating with parents about the progress of their children. Parents value the increased mutual respect and trust which has been created between students and staff at the school.

The school records and collates the achievement and progress of its students well. The detailed analysis of the trends in progress for specific groups of students, such as special education students and English language learners, is not rigorous enough. In general, monitoring procedures are insufficiently robust because of a lack of detail in action planning. This has led to inadequate credit accumulation by students in the upper grades and subsequent low graduation rates. The school has been proactive in its response by making these issues a central goal for the emerging small learning communities. A focus on core elements, such as the development of vocabulary, is an appropriate direction for the work of the school's Inquiry Teams. In general however, achievement levels are too variable, although Jump Start Academy for grade 9 students has achieved greater consistency.

The curriculum is challenging and provides a breadth of learning experiences for students, particularly for older students. Students say they are challenged in most of their lessons and are able to explain their learning goals. After-school enrichment programs successfully accommodate students' other interests and learning requirements. Strong partnerships with colleges motivate students well. Teachers are hard-working and fully committed to the personal and academic development of their students. Some instruction is too teacher-directed and does not adequately accommodate the specific learning needs of individual students. The school uses its resources well to enhance the learning opportunities of students.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The development of small learning communities such as the Jump Start Academy is having a positive impact in improving attendance rates and promoting credit accumulation.
- Guidance systems and procedures effectively provide good support for students both academically and personally.
- Professional development and support for staff by the administration, external providers and mentors successfully promote the school's aims and objectives.
- Systems for collating and interpreting data are more rigorous, which effectively enhances the monitoring of the work of the school.
- An increasingly wide elective program enables older students to take challenging advanced placement courses and college credit-bearing classes.
- Improved progress reports and use of technology to convey achievement information have positively enhanced communication with parents.

### What the school needs to improve

- Plan actions to raise achievement levels for special education students and English language learners by analyzing the extensive data for group trends.
- Focus on differentiating instruction and develop a more systematic approach to group work and time management in lessons.
- Improve action planning by specifying individual responsibilities precisely and by identifying interim benchmarks so monitoring of progress towards whole school goals within learning communities has greater coherence.
- Develop more systematic procedures for regularly reviewing and monitoring the progress of specific groups of students to enhance graduation rates and sustain better credit accumulation.

## 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 developed systematic and detailed data collection procedures for recording achievement. A subsequent analysis of data for 2008 has highlighted unacceptably high failure rates in science and American history, low graduation rates and insufficient credit accumulation for upper grades. The school has been proactive in its response by making these issues central to its improvement plans. They have given particular emphasis to allocating more time to the core subjects in grade 9 in order to increase credit accumulation. Greater familiarization with computer databases of student performance is providing improved consistency in the way achievement grades are recorded by individual teachers. The compilation of data related to special education students and English language learners is extensive, but is not used systematically to identify emerging trends or monitor progress. In consequence, achievement levels are unsatisfactory. The school has effectively identified reading comprehension as a key factor in contributing to poor performance among the lower third of its students. It has begun to address the issue by making this the focus for two Inquiry Teams that are providing support for a sample of grade 9 students.

An individual profile of student achievement is effectively compiled by staff. This is complemented by a recently introduced progress report, giving an appropriate interim assessment between each marking period. These sheets are routinely compiled by teachers in each subject area. They not only reflect general performance levels, but also specify learning goals. Student data is supplemented by a detailed identification of competencies via the Acuity software program. The compiled portfolio of evidence is basis of informed discussions with parents at conference meetings. The extensiveness of the information provided to families promotes parental engagement with their child's learning.

**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 faculty and parents are appropriately involved in the process for identification of school goals. In small learning communities and within subject departments, the use of formative and summative assessments supports the development of goals for respective cohorts of students. The organizational shift to developing small learning communities has led to a significant re-alignment of procedures for specifying goals to be included in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Each learning community formulates its own response to the overarching goals of the school. This effectively engages more staff in the process and promotes greater consistency though a shared focus on priorities. Subsequent action plans, however, do not give sufficient detail in identifying specific

responsibilities, interim checkpoints or detailed timeframes for completion. A matrix of meetings involving subject staff and small learning communities provide a number of forums to ensure that short-term objectives are shared and discussed, promoting consistency in practice. For a large institution, the school recognizes this is a continuing challenge and this is a factor in the decision to move to smaller organizational units.

A range of communications, such as newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, telephone contacts and e-mails appropriately convey the school's expectations about attendance and behavior. The new progress report is a developing format for engaging students and families in the process of identifying learning goals. The details of periodic assessments (Acuity) that identify specific skills and competencies related to English language arts and math are more regularly shared with parents. Parents are appreciative of the greater level of understanding this gives them about their child's progress. A particular feature of the progress report is the self-reflective element for students. Students are now encouraged to be more involved in thinking about learning goals through self-assessment. These new initiatives are gradually embedding into the procedures of 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.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The curriculum is challenging and provides a breadth of learning experiences, particularly for older students. The emphasis on credit accumulation in grade 9 has made the curriculum map too narrow. The school recognizes this issue and is looking to increase more interdisciplinary humanities courses into its program. The increasing number of advanced placement courses and college credit-bearing classes appropriately adds challenge and rigor to the work of upper grades. The specific needs of special education students are adequately provided for through specialized programs and combined teaching arrangements. A unique New-Comers Academy has been specifically formulated to address the significant number of English language learners. Given the variety of organizational contexts the school operates in, there is an appropriate commitment to differentiated instruction. However, practice is inconsistent in individual classrooms. Some direct classroom instruction is too long and demotivating for students. Conversely, other teachers are adept at using technology to plan and deliver lessons that are geared to the specific needs of students.

The administration effectively uses the budget to promote the learning needs of students and staff. The schedule for teachers is increasingly geared to providing common planning time for the small learning communities. In response to surveys reflecting student opinion, the school has increased the arts program. Additional classes have been provided for guitar instruction and using the Internet to explore design ideas.

Students refer to the good levels of mutual trust and respect that exist, evidenced in the positive interactions between adults and most students. This positive climate for learning is endorsed by parents. Open communication is a strong feature of the school culture.

**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 well developed.**

The school has created a differentiated professional development plan related to whole-school issues. This is systematically built up through a specified program of lesson observations and analysis of students' work, conducted through the small learning communities and in subject areas. School leaders use a common protocol to promote consistency in the identification of issues. Recent training has promoted the concept of the "differentiated classroom" and the use of assessment software to monitor achievement. The engagement of staff is indicative of the collaborative approach the administration works to engender in the school, with increasing levels of success. The approach is exemplified by opportunities for staff to be engaged in the work of two Inquiry Teams operating in the school. The principal has also wisely created an advisory group, drawn from a cross-section of the faculty, to discuss the pragmatic implications of the creation of the small learning communities. Current scheduling constraints do not afford as many opportunities for common planning as is optimally required for an initiative of this nature. However, there is a range of occasions where informal meetings take place between teachers to promote consistency and continuity in the teaching of curriculum units within the small learning communities. The school is effective in its processes for building capacity for improvement. New staff members are appropriately supported through a mentoring program and pairing with an experienced colleague. Opportunities for inter-visitations and involvement with learning walk-throughs promote increasing opportunities for reflection about professional practice, although this is not strongly evident across the learning communities.

In a broader context, the collaborative orientation of the school is reflected in its effective partnerships with a wide range of support organizations to promote student learning. These include a program to support over-aged but under-credited students, a South Asian group offering tutoring support and counseling, and the College Now program. The additional range of clubs, activities and academic interventions provided are a significant factor in promoting improving achievement for students.

**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 has effectively created procedures where strengths and areas for improvement related to the curriculum and instruction are routinely identified. Small learning community teams have extended the use of data to set interim goals and objectives in an interdisciplinary context. The subsequent discussions enable staff to make timely adjustments and improvements to curriculum maps. The lack of robustness in action planning does not provide an adequate tool for monitoring the progress of developments within the school. The routine monitoring of instruction and student outcomes form an effective basis for recommendations for professional development and curriculum revisions. For example, the math schedule was altered to give a more concentrated experience for low-achieving students.

The school is self-reflective and is now better prepared to use the data it has generated. Formative assessments and progress reports enable administration to routinely monitor the outcomes of specific classes and thereby the effectiveness of individual teachers. It uses this data to appropriately evaluate the impact of professional development initiatives and make adjustments accordingly. The school makes proactive responses to the challenges it faces as is evidenced by the move to small learning communities. This reaction is indicative of the commitment to sustain the quality of education at the school. The drive to maintain and improve outcomes is a product of the shared vision held by most of the school community.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: John Adams High School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+
<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>	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?			<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>	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?				<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, 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>	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