

# Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**Grace Dodge Career and Technical High School**

**High School 660  
2474 Crotona Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10458**

**Principal: Roberto Hernandez**

**Dates of review: May 4 – 6, 2009  
Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Grace Dodge Career and Technical High School is a high school with 1445 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 31% Black, 65% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 37% of the students enrolled and girls account for 63%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 79.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

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

This school provides both general and vocational education for all students. Six small learning communities enable students to fulfill graduation requirements and develop technical career skills.

Students and parents value the school's curriculum because students can graduate with a skill that they can use to get a job immediately upon graduation while at the same time graduate prepared for college. A high degree of mutual respect exists among all members of the Grace Dodge school community. This in turn has created a caring community where students know that they can get help from teachers who know who they are.

The teachers of this school are highly motivated to excel at meeting the needs of all students and work diligently in collaborative teams to develop practices which continue to bring them closer to achieving this goal. The school collects and collects a wide range of student data which is to set long-term and monthly goals for all students. Teachers are beginning the process of extending goal setting procedures into the classrooms to include differentiated, subject-specific short-term learning goals for students which effectively support student learning. The school has not yet achieved consistency of practice across all grades and subjects regarding differentiated instruction, thereby reducing progress for some students. Teachers are beginning to develop task-specific rubrics which enable them to suggest specific steps students can take to produce higher quality work.

Self-reflection has become an integral part of the school culture as the staff embraces the vision for the school's development. While planning for professional development aligns with the school's plans for improvement, the administration has only just begun to develop a system to use their informal observation process to generate individual teacher goals to improve instruction.

This school has been selected as a career and technical education demonstration site. These sites serve the explicit purpose of documenting and disseminating rigorous practices to improve the vocational education experience. The positive leadership of the principal drives Grace Dodge High School as it paves the way toward the next generation of 21st century schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's positive leadership, which is fully embraced by the staff, is driving the vision for continually improving student achievement.
- The school leaders collect and examine a wide range of student data from varied sources and they utilize this information to set appropriate school-wide goals.
- The Inquiry Team works collaboratively and serves as an exemplary motivational model which encourages staff to strive for increased academic rigor in their respective subjects.
- Teachers work collaboratively with school leaders, school support personnel, outside partnerships and families to accelerate the academic and personal growth of the students.
- The principal and staff work as a united team to create a calm, respectful and orderly environment for learning to take place.
- Students benefit from an increasingly broad curriculum, geared to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which provides career-based opportunities.

### What the school needs to improve

- Extend the existing goal setting procedures to include goals for classes and short-term learning goals for students to help them understand their next steps of learning.
- Develop plans for teacher professional development which meet individual as well as school needs.
- Ensure that lessons and content areas are suitably differentiated to challenge all students, particularly higher achievers, and extend their learning.
- Extend and expand communication and collaboration with parents to increase their capacity to assist in their child's learning and continue to keep families fully informed regarding their child's progress.

## 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 well-established data management systems. These enable administrators and faculty to have a clear and up-to-date picture of students' performance and progress in reading, writing, math and science for grades, classes, sub-groups and individuals. The school has also developed some of its own unique data tools to help meet the needs of their students and families. Coded "failing grade" forms inform the students, parents and faculty of the reason a student failed a grade. Their "item analysis worksheets" provide science teachers with a customized report for their classes which teachers use to tailor support and address the weaknesses of each student. The school has already planned to expand its use to additional subjects so that customized data is available in all core subjects.

Student profile sheets with color indicators are used to track a student's progress towards graduation. Green indicates that a student is on track, yellow indicates that a student is almost on track and red indicates that a student is off-track and needs to address current status within their small learning community. The progress regarding this data is being tracked for each grade publicly. "Going green" has become a reality for a greater number of students this year.

The school identifies student subgroups with particular emphasis placed upon English language learners, special education students, students in the lowest third citywide, 9th grade students and by gender, using the tools listed above to analyze their needs. English language learners have become the focus of the school's Inquiry Team while other small learning communities within the school focus on special education students, lowest third and gender subgroups in English, math, science and social studies. The 9th grade small learning community uses the Boys Town Classroom Management Program to improve social skills and ensure student success for its students. These endeavors and the creation of extended learning programs have impacted the school positively by helping to reduce the suspension rate and increasing the graduation rate. Separate male and female career responsibility seminars are carefully designed to meet gender specific student needs.

The school currently conducts monthly goal sessions with all students at which students complete goal sheets. These are sent home and signed by parents. However, while these goal sheets have established strong links with parents, they do not all include short-term learning goals which families need to assist their children with their 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 principal involves teachers, parents and students in developing school improvement goals. These constituencies are included as members of the school leadership team and evaluate and develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan. The teachers are motivated by the fact that they are listened to by the administration and have a real voice in goal setting at the school. The fact that 70% of the teaching staff attended a recent weekend redesign retreat, held at a professional conference center, validates the high degree of teacher motivation. This year’s school goals are sensible and effectively support school development. Present monitoring of the “Go Green” program indicates an increase in the school’s graduation rate by 10% in June of 2009 and another 2% in August 2009. The school is presently enjoying a 42% drop in school suspensions as compared to last year. This indicates the level of improvement in the tone and climate of the building, which is an outcome of the positive tone set by the staff and the school’s partnership with Boys’ Town Incorporated, the provider of a social skills improvement program.

At present, only special education students have clearly defined, skill-specific learning goals. General education students are only able to focus on general goals such as improving attendance, completing homework and coming to school on time. They lack an understanding of the specific skills they need to develop in order to reach higher levels of academic competence. However, planning is at an advanced stage to use the monthly goal setting sessions to provide all students with subject-specific short-term goals and next learning steps in order to accelerate their learning.

The school’s Inquiry Team is studying sixteen English language learners from the School of Health and Sciences who need to improve language skills to pass the English Regents. Each student is graded on a rubric which is used to generate individual goals and lesson plans, with conferencing scheduled in as a regular class activity. A special collaborative class has been formed to meet the needs of these students and serves as a vehicle to help others understand the inquiry process. Many of the strategies developed are being utilized with other students in the lower grades. The Inquiry Team process was observed by all members of the small learning communities. This has had a tremendous impact on the school because they, in turn, have formed their own inquiry teams. Every teacher in the school now serves on one of these focus teams. In addition, a 9th grade student inquiry team has been formed to allow the students to make suggestions to the teachers to improve instruction and communication. These teams meet regularly and serve as an active laboratory for implementing, reflecting upon and refining practices to support student and teacher success.

**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 enables students to graduate prepared for college and certified to obtain employment in the areas of nursing, cosmetology, court reporting, vision technology,

desktop publishing, emergency medical technician and other careers for which they have completed the required internship hours and passed the required certification exams. Students enter the Ninth Grade Academy for one year before selecting their vocational course. The students appreciate the internship experience because, as one of them said, "It shows us the real world, the outside." Parents comment positively about the sense of responsibility their children develop participating in the various internships.

The school levels of trust and respect are above average as evidenced by positive remarks by students, teachers and parents and sound Learning Environment Survey statistics. One student remarked, "The students and the teachers have a great bond here." A teacher commented on the school's recent weekend retreat by stating, "This professional development made us a family. Today I feel like I can do anything." This environment enables learning to take place for both students and teachers.

The school leaders consult monthly with the school leadership team and utilize the budget to meet student needs. This practice ensures that members of staff have the resources necessary to deliver instruction utilizing innovative approaches. Promethean Boards have been installed in most classrooms on the second floor with plans to purchase more. The numbers of laptop computers for student and teacher use continues to rise. The school expects to accomplish even greater technological advances as a designated 21st century demonstration site.

The school has not yet achieved consistency regarding differentiated instruction in the classroom. As a result, many lessons and content areas are not suitably differentiated to challenge all students, particularly high achievers, so learning is not sufficiently extended to promote the rigorous engagement required for deeper understanding. However, lessons are differentiated in special education classrooms, where students work on individualized activities based on their own particular learning goals, which supports them in improving their skills and accelerating their learning.

**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 uses an informal observation protocol to create data on teacher needs. This form generates performance measures, but as yet there is no rubric to explain ratings and establish a basis for creating differentiated professional development plans for teachers. This lack of clarity hampers the administration's ability to provide meaningful feedback and set individual goals for teacher progress that take account of both school and individual needs.

All teachers in the school, together with support personnel and administrators, meet twice each week and actively engage in the inquiry process through their small learning community focus teams. These teams use a tuning protocol that requires them to look at student work in order to assess its quality. The participants then offer constructive feedback to one another in order to collaboratively design standards-based lessons that reach rigorous levels of cognitive complexity and ultimately improve the quality of student work. These distributive structures ensure that teachers are part of the decisions that impact their work. As one teacher said, "The teachers feel empowered because they have a voice and are listened to. This filters down to the students."

Successful partnerships with the fire and police departments support the academic and personal growth of students, particularly through their active participation in the instruction being provided in the emergency medical technician classes and the motivational assembly celebrating males making responsible choices. The school also uses the Boys Town Classroom Management Program with this year's 9th grade students to help students develop the social skills that support a positive school culture, tone and climate. The school leadership and staff have also designed numerous credit recovery programs and after-school extended learning programs in multiple subject areas to help students make up credits. These programs have accelerated the academic and personal growth of many students, enabling more of them to graduate sooner.

**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 principal meets with his cabinet weekly to evaluate school plans for improving student outcomes and instructional practices. Each assistant principal is responsible for their particular small learning community in which they participate in all inquiry team meetings and teach one subject to one class of students. Each small learning community focus team is actively designing instructional goals for teachers in order to eventually create differentiated teacher development plans. The assistant principals update the principal weekly regarding progress in reaching desired goals. One major school goal was to increase the attendance rate. The school has implemented a number of effective strategies, such as the creation of these small learning communities, which are having a positive impact on attendance, raising the rate to 81.5%.

The school's motivation and willingness to monitor and revise its practices to meet student needs is exemplary. This year's meeting structure had required the principal to meet with the instructional staff in several separate meetings each month. The school has voted in favor of a school-based option to restructure contractual extended teaching time. This agreement between the administration and teachers has enabled the school to have monthly meetings in which all faculty members are present. It has also provided regularly scheduled time so that teachers can meet with students in each small learning community to monitor each student's progress and develop monthly goals.

The Comprehensive Education Plan aligns with the principal's performance review and the school goals. The school's self-evaluation is an accurate reflection of the school's practices. The frequency of collaborative team meetings which regularly utilize the tuning protocol demonstrates that self-reflection is a widespread and integral part of the school's processes. All members of the school community overwhelmingly understand and support the present vision for the school's development.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Grace Dodge Career and Technical 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.**

To what extent do ...	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.**

To what extent do school leaders...	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.**

To what extent do ...	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	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed