

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**John Adams**

**High School 480**

**101-02 Rockaway Boulevard  
Queens  
NY 11417**

**Principal: Grace Zwillenberg**

**Dates of review: May 17 - 19, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

John Adams is a high school with 3286 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 28% Black, 36% Hispanic, 4% White, 27% Asian, 1% Native American, and 3% Multiracial students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 77.9%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is well developed.**

John Adams high school has realized very successfully its vision to “create a motivating atmosphere of cooperation, collaboration, and creativity.” Clear school goals translate into high expectations. As one student explained, “Everyone is changing now.” Staff members convey a very positive attitude and share responsibility for creating conditions that enable positive student outcomes. Respectful interactions with students and consistent discipline create a safe and warm atmosphere. Students speak enthusiastically about the caring school staff. They express appreciation that the school recognizes their achievements, helps them set personal goals and provides them with many support programs to insure their success. Parents concur, “concerned teachers, concerned faculty from the principal on down”. The school provides a standards based differentiated curriculum and a rich diversity of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities such as lifeguard certification courses for advanced swimmers. Practices such as differentiation, writing in the classroom, and student talk are common features but defined qualitative expectations are not yet explicit across grades and subject areas

Strategic organizational decisions support school goals. One such decision was the re-organization of the school into nine small learning communities, which has been transformative in building community and enabling teachers to assume leadership roles. One teacher explained, “Now ‘we’ are steering...” Teachers’ goal alignment with school goals supports strong cohesive efforts. Individual goals, though, do not always reflect measurable criteria linked to specific practices and student outcomes. The school performs extensive longitudinal data analysis, graphing student performance over time and disaggregating performance of all sub-groups and by small learning communities. The ready availability and readability of this critical information has resulted in the development of a data driven culture where staff members use data to inform instruction, to monitor and improve safety and attendance, to develop school programs and to set targeted goals. This clear understanding enables well-informed interventions that have resulted in significant gains in credit accumulation and Regents success across all school grades and sub-groups. The development of customized pre-assessments, protocols for reviewing student work and teacher designed assessments for learning, however, are still needs in strengthening pedagogy. Strong structures for reflective evaluation of school curriculum and instruction insure on-going adjustment of practices. The school’s willingness to grow is evident in its responsiveness to implementing suggestions from past quality reviews and its rigorous analysis of data. The principal is a strong advocate for students who places trust in staff holding them accountable and building community. One teacher aptly explained, “Not mine, ours.”

## Part 2: Overview

## What the school does well

- Comprehensive data collection and analysis illuminate strengths and needs accurately, enabling targeted action that improves student-learning outcomes.
  - The school disaggregates data meticulously for all sub-groups, graphs longitudinal progress on all State exams, and analyzes scholarship reports regularly, providing a clear understanding of key trends and areas for action. As a result, staff members implement intervention immediately. The number of English language learners, special education students and others who are passing Regents is increasing. Aggressive attendance tracking, analysis and targeted follow-up has improved the overall attendance rate this year.
  - School leaders and faculty analyze a wide-range of data intentionally and develop key study questions. Probing causal factors that inhibit learning, they discovered that poor vocabulary skills, rather than lack of content knowledge, were hindering English language arts performance. Subsequently, school-wide inquiry study was shaped around vocabulary acquisition. In the area of social studies, analysis revealed that only 20% of students had passed eighth grade social studies exams. This finding set in motion a department action plan and creation of SMART goals and geography instruction to increase passing rates. Current performance indicates success in meeting prescribed goals.
- The school community is dedicated to supporting its students and its cohesive efforts result in a safe and productive learning environment.
  - Small learning community teams, which are valued by both students and teachers, support students' academic and emotional development collaboratively. Teachers team with an advisor three times a week to serve identified at-risk grade 12 students. The advisories serve as a successful forum to monitor progress and retool efforts astutely, thus helping students improve attendance and grades.
  - Students speak about the strong dedication of their teachers and describe as "special" the way adults know their names and greet them. They express appreciation for the rich variety of extra-curricular activities, the varied courses and the special modifications that help them achieve and engage them in their learning. They express trust in the school and appreciate being part of a community.
- Strategic organizational decisions support progress in meeting goals that address school-wide and student needs effectively.
  - The principal relocated a majority of grade 9 students to an annex, reducing overcrowding, and creating school-wide single session scheduling, thus enabling student participation in after-school extra-curricular activities. An assistant principal for accountability provides comprehensive data support giving staff members access to detailed, disaggregated data. Teachers acknowledge a culture shift to data driven work resulting in enhanced understanding and action that address the needs of all sub-groups of students around their learning needs to meet set goals.
  - The school's reorganization into seven theme-based small learning communities has aligned the schools' goals with meeting student needs very successfully.

Teachers acknowledge that this has strengthened provision of differentiated support and curriculum modification to meet students' learning needs. Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) is now provided as a pullout program and the co-sharing of instructional space allows for fluid regrouping of students assisting at-risk students, while utilizing individual teacher expertise.

- The school's explicit data-based goals establish priorities and allow ongoing monitoring, garnering community support effectively.
  - All constituencies' involvement in data analysis and their familiarity with previous Quality Reviews enables them to know and strongly support the implementation of school-wide goals. The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan lists measurable SMART goals monitored through interim benchmarks succinctly. These clear mandates spur focused efforts, which have resulted in a significant reduction of students who are not on track.
  - Supervisors provide detailed data that teachers say help them to evaluate their own pedagogy in terms of student success and to reflect on needed adjustments. For example, the ninth grade annex supervisor provides teachers with weekly and end of marking period statistical and attendance data by grade, subject and class.
- The school clearly conveys high expectations for academics, behavior and attendance, and these expectations have supported academic success.
  - Parents praise the school's frequent outreach efforts that engage them in ongoing dialogue regarding strategic decisions in improving their child's learning. They fully support the school's emphasis on college readiness. Six marking period reports and six additional interim assessment reports insure reiteration of expectations to keep students on track for high achievement.
  - A student described accurately the school's discipline, attendance and lateness policies stating, "They play no games." A progressive discipline protocol coupled with coordinated hall sweeps and timely home phone contacts have resulted in better class attendance, cleaner hallways and a peaceful, happy school environment. Staff members have rigorous procedures in place to reiterate expectations and intervene quickly for behavior and academic concerns such as students failing to attend tutoring. They electronically tag student ID's so that as students are scanned into school they can be pulled for one-on-one conferences.
- The school develops effectively distributive leadership and collaboration that advances focused inquiry, leading to improved student outcomes.
  - Teacher directors of the new small learning communities demonstrate self-confidence and strong commitment to supporting their fellow teachers. Realizing the need for their own learning, they formed an inquiry team, which allowed them to share their work and establish inquiry as the common ground across all communities. They attribute students' new positive attitudes toward assessments to a strong common purpose engendered by their cohesiveness as a team. A teacher professional development team increases staff ownership and encourages reflective practice in evaluating individual and collective progress.
  - Teacher teams collaborate resourcefully and credit students' improved vocabulary skills to their structured inquiry efforts. Interdisciplinary English-social studies teams develop project-based learning tasks to promote meaningful cross-content connections, resulting in students producing high quality multi-media and physical projects. Algebra teachers created their own assessment to better

gauge the needs of those students who were unable to perform basic algebraic equations. All teachers develop creative classroom strategies to support vocabulary development goals deriving from school-wide inquiry study.

- Continuous evaluation of instructional and organizational decisions insures cohesive policies and on-going adjustments to increase student learning.
  - The school uses its cabinet meetings, principal advisory, director and small learning community meetings judiciously as the vehicles to assess, monitor, and revise student and teacher learning and to revise curriculum and instructional strategies. As a result, English language arts strategies were modified to align more closely with State standards.
  - Although off track seniors were already being served by special programs, the school cabinet, in conjunction with teacher teams, identified a subset of students who needed additional help. As a result, a senior academy was developed mid-year and students were programmed for additional advisory 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> periods with specially selected teachers who had a record of demonstrated success with at-risk students.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Enhance individual and teacher teams' ability to assess trends more observantly within their own classes and within student groups to appraise learning needs. 2.2
  - Teachers collaborate well to analyze a plenitude of data and modify instruction, but protocols for analyzing student work to elucidate class-wide trends and inform practice are not as well established.
  - Teachers administer diagnostic assessments consistently, but the designing of customized pre-assessments is not yet sufficiently used school-wide in all classes.
- Improve individual professional development plans to build teacher capacity by crafting goals more reflective of specific pedagogic practices. 4.1
  - Teacher professional goals are congruent with school-wide initiatives. However, not all supervisory management decisions and individual teacher goals sufficiently reflect back to specific pedagogic practices and measurable objectives such as those that can be analyzed through the lens of student work.
- Expand study of standards and thinking skills to increase coherence across grades and subject areas to further student achievement. 1.1
  - Standards based curriculum maps, grouping, differentiation, student talk, and rubric assessment are common throughout the school. However, the tools that teachers use to identify rigorous standards are not yet in place in all grades and subjects.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: John Adams High School	△	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				X
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X			
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				X			
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>