

# **Quality Review Report 2009-2010**

**Hillcrest High School**

**High School 505**

**160 – 05 Highland Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11432**

**Principal: Stephen Duch**

**Dates of review: January 5 – 7, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Geri Taylor-Brown**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Hillcrest High School is a high school with 3,358 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 46% Black, 23% Hispanic, 2% White, and 28% Asian and 1% Native American students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 84.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

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

Inspirational! Motivational! Home! These are some of the descriptors that students use when they speak about their school: Hillcrest High School. This large school makes each student feel “treasured” as staff members go the extra mile offering academic and emotional support.

The foundation for this nurturing environment is the Principal, who sets the tone of high expectations and goals for all students. His commitment to educating the whole child is realized in a distinctive organizational structure of nine Smaller Learning Communities (SLCs), each giving students a strong sense of community and enabling resources to be placed exactly where they are needed. The curriculum is broad with a range of academic courses that are standards aligned and that address the learning needs of struggling students as well as those students who are prepared to accumulate college credits.

The school also analyses a great array of student data from numerous sources which is readily available to students and staff through the New Visions Data system. These brightly and informative colored data documents use color, bar graphs, and pie charts to convey when students are progressing or struggling at-a-glance. As a result, teachers have a clear picture of which student academic needs to address during class lessons.

Many teachers use the school-wide data trends information to develop a variety of instructional activities to engage students during class lessons. However, there is not yet consistent usage of differentiated instruction that specifically addresses individual student learning needs. Nevertheless, teachers are eager to improve their skills and learn from each other and common weekly planning time is helping this process. As a result, they are using data about students' achievement in a more focused and productive way and are beginning to share approaches to teaching that better promote student learning. While all teachers are actively involved on teacher teams, individuals do not yet have a personal, comprehensive plan for continued professional development.

Although the school has established clear and concise school-wide goals, there are no interim goals to facilitate a continual process of monitoring progress towards goals and revising subsequent action where appropriate. Parental involvement is also a concern: while the school provides opportunities for parents to visit and discuss their child's progress, the number attending meetings is low.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's rich and broad standards aligned curriculum, ranging from online courses to advanced placement classes, provides students of different abilities with varied opportunities to ensure academic progress.
  - The Smaller Learning Community design serves as a solid foundation for student continued learning through theme-infused class offerings. Within these nine effective communities of learning teachers expand curricula to include more engaging information. Additionally, the SLC promotes the feeling of belonging for both students and staff. As a result, students are highly motivated to learn.
  - Student credit accumulation is accelerated through a great variety of class offerings including: online Nova Net for credit recovery, Advanced Placement and College Now for college credit and classes such as Council for Unity, a forum for students to develop leadership abilities. This diversity speaks to the school's commitment to offer studies that take into account student interest and achievement.
- School leaders and faculty have a clear picture of data trends through the collection and analysis of a broad range of student data which is used by most faculty to inform class lessons and overall instruction.
  - Some faculty members are adept at using information about school-wide data trends to help identify student needs. For example, the overall school focus on student writing and reading, the need for which was highlighted by the analysis of achievement data, is echoed in many classes across content areas. As a result, assessment scores have risen, particularly in the Social Studies content area where the "Vocabulary Improves Performance" focus has rendered a 38% improvement to the passing rate on monthly formative assessments.
- The principal's strong leadership is successfully promoting a school-wide transformation that consistently focuses on students' personal growth and has resulted in a safe environment where students are eager to learn.
  - Students and staff have benefited from the principal's leadership which promotes an openness to discuss concerns and new ideas that improve student success. One student explained that this openness had enabled him and a group of like minded students to develop his interest in art by forming "The Art Society" in his SLC.
  - School leadership has wisely included pupil personnel staff as integral members of all teacher teams. Their involvement in the development of academic plans for children has ensured that support services are aligned to improve student learning.

- Teachers are empowered to take leadership roles and responsibilities and work in collaborative interdisciplinary teams discussing and sharing good teaching practices that accelerate student learning.
  - All teachers are part of a teacher inquiry team. These teams, which meet weekly, are led by highly respected teacher-leaders who, using their skills as facilitators, galvanize their colleagues to move from “anecdotal conversations” to their evolving “data discussions”. As a result, more practice is shared and there is more widespread usage of a variety of instructional activities.
  - Three cohorts of school leaders have been developed through the school’s partnership with Baruch College. The Scaffolding Apprenticeship Models Program offers teachers the opportunity to gain administrative credit as they attend class at their school site. This has improved the leadership of instruction and has promoted better student learning.
  
- This school has a safe and warm environment where all staff nurture, support and guide students, by expecting and encouraging all students to aspire to the best.
  - Staff members provide a school environment where students feel “at home” and are well supported. Students speak passionately about the life-changing support they receive from Hillcrest staff members. Their poignant stories recount how this staff goes well above and beyond what is expected to ensure that students know that they are “not alone”.
  
- School leaders use all resources wisely to support interventions that improve student achievement.
  - The school rightly invests vast resources into maintaining the SLC design. Since the implementation of the SLC there have been incremental increases in some Regents passing rates, coupled with an improving graduation rate.
  - School leaders maintain a school schedule that provides weekly common planning for every teacher and support staff to meet and share practices. This has provided the forum for staff to extend their expertise and improve student learning.

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

- Expand the usage of differentiated instruction to ensure that the learning needs of all students are met consistently through instructional interventions that are specific to their academic needs.
  - Many teachers use varied instructional strategies to appeal to student learning styles. However, most teaching interventions are broadly generalized and not focused on students’ individual learning needs as indicated by their assessments. As a result, not all student-learning needs are met.

- Teachers use a mixture of questioning approaches. However, teachers of struggling students do not regularly use high order questioning. As a result some lessons for these students are not as rigorous as class lessons for high achieving students.
- Extend the use of supervisory observations, coupled with teachers' self-reflections, to develop enhanced professional development opportunities to hone pedagogical skills.
  - Assistant principals do “daily walkthrough” to “capture attendance and observe instruction”, and teachers are beginning to use a learning lab forum to share and discuss good instructional strategies. However, school leaders do not yet provide uniform supervisory feedback across all departments and school learning communities, or develop individual professional plans, thus hampering consistent teacher school-wide growth.
- Improve action planning by developing interim benchmarks that promote the regular evaluation and adjustment of organizational and instructional decisions to address the changing needs of students.
  - The school has established clear and concise school-wide goals. However, there are no interim goals and benchmarks, which teachers and school leaders can use to measure the impact of school actions and the effectiveness of school plans. As a result, there is too much reliance on State assessment data for evaluating progress and little to indicate whether plans are on the right track to achieve the final goal.
- Continue to identify and implement ways to increase parental participation and involvement that places parents as true partners in all aspects of school life.
  - Parent participation remains low and this has an impact on student motivation and progress. The school is striving to involve more parents by, for example training them in the use of ARIS' Parent Link, developing a website with “twitter” capacity, and sponsoring concerts and other family events throughout the school year. While these initiatives are leading to increased parent participation there is still more to be done.
  - The school keeps all parents informed about student progress through regular distribution of report cards. However, the school has not yet established a suitable way to encourage parents to contribute their views on their child's next learning steps.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: Hillcrest High School</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<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?				<b>X</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				<b>X</b>
<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?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

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