

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

John Adams

High School 480

**101-01 Rockaway Blvd
Queens
NY 11407**

Principal: Daniel Scanlon

Dates of review: May 7, 8, 9 2013

Lead Reviewer: Leslie Miller Chislett

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

John Adams is a/an high school with 3,117 students from nine through grade twelfth grade. The school population comprises 27% Black, 38% Hispanic, 3% White, 5% Native American and 25% Asian students. The student body includes 17% 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 2011 - 2012 was 79.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has established a coherent vision for school improvement that has been accepted school-wide creating an instructional focus and goals that are tracked to drive student academic progress. 3.1
 - According to the principal's rationale, adult learning must occur in order for instruction in all classrooms and all content areas to improve to elevate rigor and student engagement, ultimately resulting in increased graduation and college and career readiness for all students. Related measurable goals focus on developing both teacher and assistant principal capacity with high-leveraged engagement strategies through purposeful opportunities for collaboration at both a content and interdisciplinary level, creating a system for teacher observations and feedback, and implementing monthly Regents items as formative assessments to determine both student content knowledge and skill gaps. Yearlong plans for professional development, observations in five-week cycles, assessment implementation, and attendance and safety improvements were planned and put in place. In addition, long-term plans to diversify the student body through the opening of two new-screened small learning community programs (SLCs) in the 2013-2014 school year were proposed and approved. One SLC will be built around science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and the other around art history. With the support of the new assistant principal for accountability, all assistant principals, guide their departments in tracking student performance on Regents' practice items and Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)-aligned tasks. Faculty gained information through the process about patterns of performance with content and skills and made decisions to adjust instruction accordingly. Attendance and safety data are being monitored as well. The overall impact has been improvement in school climate and student learning as evidenced by an increase in school-wide attendance data by a few percentage points with greater gains for certain SLCs such as the ninth grade; reduced safety incidents and disciplinary infractions, and improved performance on certain English language arts, math, science, social studies Regents multiple-choice items.
 - School leadership conducted an examination of student data credit accrual and Regents passing rates relative to each teacher. From this, it became apparent that goal-setting and action planning should focus on building the capacity of assistant principals to provide teachers with quality feedback on classroom instruction, assisting lead teachers in facilitating team work, and supporting all teachers to ensure students meet the demands of the Regents exams that have been a hurdle to their success in key courses and timely graduation. A "teacher effectiveness and professional development" plan mapped out topics for adult learning agendas including observation and feedback methods, assessment data analysis, CCLS instructional shifts such as disciplined-based literacy skills, and discussion techniques to enhance student engagement. To monitor each department's progress towards goals, the principal implemented the documentation of SLC decisions and follow-up in writing. The principal and assistant principals gather "snapshots" through informal classroom observations and evaluate teacher practice data through formal observations. As this information is aligned with a teacher common teacher practice framework, trends towards school-wide goals for teacher effectiveness are observed. Leadership also summarizes interim scholarship data and informs teachers about how their

classes are doing in light of the school-wide goal to increase graduation rate to 65%. As a result of the monitoring of goals and plans, leadership practices support teacher development in the use of effective pedagogy aligned with the vision, and student engagement is improving across classrooms.

- School leadership has made vital organizational decisions for the use of resources, space, staff time, student programming, and hiring, to meet the school's goals, resulting in teacher development and student advancement toward graduation. 1.3
 - An analysis of the timing and type of student behavioral infractions surfaced the need to stagger entries to the building and create a process of hall sweeps that would increase safety and hold students accountable for timely arrivals to classes. This has produced an overall reduction in the number of documented incidents from 500 to 90 this year. To further align resources with the school's instructional goals, consultant coaches were brought in to develop assistant principal capacity to conduct textbook and technology inventories, provide teacher professional development, and create systems to track and monitor scholarship and teacher performance data. Band teacher and librarian positions were created; 75 computers and Smart boards were acquired fostering increased student participation in the arts classes and use of the library for research. The UFT Teacher Center specialist was utilized to assist with professional development, in CCLS implementation, and to provide intense support to science and social studies teachers where Regents passing rates have been extremely low. Common planning time for the teachers within each Small Learning Community (SLC) and disciplinary department was built into the schedule. In addition to numerous partnerships with community-based organizations that the school maintains, a partnership was secured with Queens Borough Community College to assist with the development of the new-screened SLC programs for 2013-14. The result has been an increased focus on professional learning evidenced by a focus on literacy and the identification of a common set of instructional strategies to build student engagement.
 - A review of student data and over 3,200 student transcripts revealed credit accrual, Regents passing, and graduation rates, were lagging in part from programming practices that did not ensure students were being scheduled for the academic coursework essential for graduation. The decision was made to hire or reassign leaders in several key leadership positions, such as those overseeing guidance, programming, physical education, accountability data, special education, and the freshmen small learning community located off-site. To further the school's student achievement goals for Students with Disabilities (SWDs), individualized education plans (IEPs) were examined early in the year. Consequently, over 100 students were moved to less restrictive environments with different and more appropriate interventions put in place for some students. Evening and Saturday schools were created and 30 sections of classes during the regular school day to address credit deficits and prepare students for Regents. The result has been more students passing Regents in August and on track to graduate. For example in the senior cohort, August to January Regents passing rates were advanced: in the Law SLC, the percent of students passing the US History Regents went from 63% to 78%, in Queens Business Institute SLC, the percentage of students passing the science Regents exams went from 58% to 64% in January. and in the Senior Academy for under credited and overage students, the percentage of students passing the English language arts Regents went from 76% to 81%. This kind of data for all SLCs and Regents is posted to make progress towards graduation visible to the school community affirming the school's vision and commitment to raise student achievement.

- Teachers use common assessments and rubrics across grades and subjects to determine student progress toward key standards to identify learning gaps, and to generate actionable feedback used to adjust instruction. 2.2
 - Teachers of courses that culminate in a Regents exam administer select test items to students monthly. Working in ELA, math, science, and social studies department teams, teachers collaboratively analyze the results to determine student strengths and weaknesses. A common template for assessment analysis is used by each teacher that organizes the results into patterns, such as the most frequently missed items and the specific content and skill targeted by the test. This enables individual teachers, those that teach the same courses, and the department as a whole, to understand current student performance and work collaboratively to refine instruction and provide feedback to students. For example, the science and social studies departments observed that lack of academic vocabulary hinders students from understanding multiple choice items or document-based questions. In response, teachers employed Marzano's approach to vocabulary development to support students' comprehension of text that resulted in improvements on targeted assessment items.
 - The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward subject area goals for student acquisition of content and skills as well as progress towards goals for credit accrual and Regent's passing rate for grade-level cohorts. Individual teachers and teams examine Regent's item analyses or student work samples and work together to select strategies that will improve lesson plans. In addition to Regents-based assessments, departments utilize rubrics in math and literacy aligned to performance tasks to gain actionable feedback on student performance as demanded by the new standards. Using information from base-line assessments, ELA teachers observed students struggling in a number of areas, for example, organizing writing around a controlling idea and supporting their ideas with evidence from text. Using a basic writing skills program called Hochman and CCLS writing rubrics, teachers worked with students to improve structure, coherence, and clarity in expository and argumentative writing. According to teachers, common assessments help in understanding student progress toward shared goals and in refining instruction. ELA teachers observe that on formative assessments students are improving in writing organization and in the use of evidence from text to support positions.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen school and classroom culture through the expansion of professional learning, student services, and classroom routines that foster student voice and adoption of academic and personal behaviors aligned with college and career readiness for all students. 1.4
 - The school's tone is generally respectful. Students and parents describe the environment as safe and welcoming, diverse but inclusive. However, school leadership is working to address areas of need related to school culture. The principal explains and parents confirm that the school's Parent Teacher Association is re-forming and a parent coordinator was recently hired to increase parental involvement, which historically has been low. Workshops for parents are now offered and focus on cyber bullying, drug abuse and the college admissions process. Although, juniors and seniors enthusiastically explain that numerous afterschool clubs are available to all students, these opportunities for the

development of interests, leadership, and voice, were not widely known to the sample of students interviewed. Both students and teachers explain that while opportunities for voice currently exist in higher-level classes such as senior English and advanced placement literature classes during Socratic seminars or the journalism elective where a student newspaper is published, opportunities for voice are not yet evident for all students within classrooms. Therefore, students are not fully engaged in the life of the school and motivation for learning is not evidenced in all students in the majority of classrooms thus limiting student growth.

- Under the direction of the AP of Guidance and college counselor, the school community is beginning to develop a culture that supports college and career readiness. The college center is being reorganized to invite students to explore post-secondary options and initiatives that foster college aspirations are emerging. Currently, most of the work of the school's sole college counselor focuses on application support for seniors, assemblies for students in other grades, and college fairs. Guidance counselors have been assigned to SLCs to ensure a manageable caseload and advise academic programming to keep students on track for graduation. The school has numerous supports to address students at-risk who need social and emotional support. However, professional development, parent outreach, and learning experiences are not fully aligned to promote academic and personal behaviors such as motivation, work-habits/organizational skills, and resilience correlated with college and career readiness. Consequently, acceleration of the school's graduation rate and college and career preparation for all students is hindered.
- Deepen the planning and implementation of coherent Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)-aligned units of study with embedded performance tasks and complex texts that emphasize higher-levels of thinking for a diversity of students. 1.1
 - The school has revised curriculum maps to show what CCLSs will be addressed during certain units of instruction, and has selected and implemented units of study that focus on argument writing in the various disciplines. School leaders and teachers explain the purposeful decisions made to emphasize the literacy and math shifts such as reading non-fiction text and using evidence from text or problem solving in math to deepen conceptual understanding. Currently, most literacy unit outlines list strategies and generally describe the end-of-unit assessments. However detailed lessons sequenced to build towards rigor and culminate in CCLS aligned performance tasks are not yet evident. Thus, students are not provided with the opportunity to analyze multiple complex texts as required by the standards. Additionally, although the ELA and social studies plans show the final product to be a five-paragraph essay where students argue their side, instructional supports and extensions for English Language Learners (ELLs) and SWDs are not included. Therefore, as a consequence of lack of alignment with the rigor in the standards and lack of planning to engage ELLs and SWDs, curriculum lacks the potential to address the CCLS and close the achievement gap.
- Ensure consistent use of scaffolds, discussion techniques, and other effective instructional strategies across classrooms to provide multiple entry points to learning tasks and elevate the level of thinking for all students including ELLs and SWDs. 1.2
 - Across classrooms teaching practices are becoming aligned to the belief that engagement is central to student learning. Through the school leader's use of the Danielson framework and CCLS instructional shifts, a common language about

effective instructional strategies, like planning coherent instruction to include active engagement, accountability through assessment, and questioning and discussion techniques is emerging among administration and faculty. However, although specific strategies related to these domains of practice like think-pair-share and discussion chains have been targeted, student engagement was inconsistently evidenced in visits to classrooms. For example, sometimes teachers incorporated think-pair-share in their lesson plan, but did not prompt students with a discussion question, nor allow them time to think and interact. Some teachers used silent debate to encourage the students to support an argument from two different positions, but students did not discuss what they were writing and teachers did not assess their understanding during the lesson. Questioning typically volleyed between the teacher and called-upon students and, in some classrooms, teachers answered questions instead of allowing other students to share thoughts. In most classrooms observed, teachers explained that they were heterogeneously pairing students to help one another and all students worked on the same task. Scaffolds to provide varied approaches to learning tasks were not frequently used except for the occasional graphic organizer. During this review, the execution of lessons that were part of CCLS-aligned units was observed in science, social studies, and ELA. Numerous lesson plans focused on the location of evidence from text to support argument writing. However, in most classes students did not fully demonstrate independent thinking to articulate the claim and how a quote supported the idea. Exceptions to these trends were Integrated Collaborative Teaching classes that involved students in a gallery-walk to discuss primary source photos depicting capital punishment, and a senior ELA class-preparing students for a Lincoln Douglas debate. However, as pedagogy is not yet fully aligned to the framework for effective practice and instructional shifts of the CCLS, levels of student participation and cognitive engagement are not consistently high across classes, thus limiting student academic growth and progress towards graduation.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: John Adams High School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?			X				
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		X					
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed