



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

John Adams High School

High School Q480

**101-01 Rockaway Boulevard
Queens
NY 11417**

Principal: Daniel Scanlon

**Date of review: April 5, 2016
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth**

The School Context

John Adams High School is a high school with 2,450 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 32% Asian, 23% Black, 37% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 16% students with disabilities. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 82.5%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	Celebration	Well Developed
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Developing
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Findings	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards that strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks in a coherent way.

Impact

The school planning documents demonstrate coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration and staff strongly support a school-wide curriculum grounded in the use of Writing is Thinking with Strategic Inquiry (WITsi) approaches. A review of lesson planning documents showcased the integration of WITsi strategies incorporated in all core content areas and several elective courses. For example, a lesson plan in English Language Arts (ELA) includes a handout for students to answer “If the death of Caesar was truly a sacrifice?” as determined by reading Shakespeare’s play, *Julius Caesar*. Students will be instructed to read Act 2.3 and complete the WITsi-Pair-Share (sentence expansion) using the prompts “whose and what.” A math handout, included with a lesson plan, instructs the students to use the WITsi approach to expand the sentence and write a full sentence explaining the process of simplifying a radical, once having identified the “how” and “why?” Similar WITsi strategies and student outcomes are included in science, social studies, and Spanish planning documents.
- An instructional goal communicated by staff is to deepen and strengthen the coherent use of complex text and vocabulary within all lessons. All lesson plans reviewed, identify explicit focus on the acquisition of key vocabulary and expectations for students to show mastery of the acquired vocabulary in content areas. Several social studies curricular planning documents list focus vocabulary terms such as, total war, Portuguese Cartaz system, and absolutism. Additionally, vocabulary graphic organizers are planned to be available for students struggling with content-specific vocabulary. Lesson plans from science highlight a focus on essential vocabulary inclusive of; heredity, chromosomes, allele, and inheritance. The impetus for focus on vocabulary was shared by building leadership who stated, “For students who aren’t successful, we are trying to figure out why...vocabulary is a skills gap teachers need to address...so we teach to the vocabulary, ask for a definition, and they (student) need to know the subtext.”
- Rigorous habits are built into each lesson plan through staff unpacking the Common Core Learning Standards adopted curricula. Math and ELA departments have adopted the content developed with *EngageNY*, while science and social studies have adopted the curriculum from New Visions. Modifications to all unit plans are embedded coherently to meet the individual needs of students. For example, a grade 10 ELA *EngageNY* unit targeting skills to support central idea and writing strategies consistently emphasizes students identifying the appositive and conjunctions in their response, while a grade 12 ELA *EngageNY* lesson plan has been modified to identify what students will be able to do, such as defend a central idea and infer how the author uses language and style.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best while teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, were not able to demonstrate their thinking skills in student work products consistently across classes leading to uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- A school-wide instructional focus is meaningful engagement, defined as involving all students in thinking in all aspects of the lesson, according to the School Self-Evaluation Form. However, student engagement was observed inconsistently throughout most classes. In an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Algebra class students worked at one of three stations to learn how to factor trinomials. Students were assigned their station based on the previous day formative assessment. While two girls partnered were discussing the writing of their expanded sentence, another boy was unable to explain what a trinomial is, even though he knew the mathematical procedures to follow to solve the equation. During a life science lesson, students were generating essential vocabulary definitions in small groups on a graphic organizer. While some students shared-out additional information to be included on the front board to further their understanding of the vocabulary, the teacher did not add the additional information. As a result, missed opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking and remain engaged in some tasks occurred.
- Students were often grouped with one or more partners during their class task assignments. Although they were grouped, it was not apparent how the grouping permitted increased engagement with the task. During a social studies class, students interpreted several propaganda documents supporting the appointment of Hitler as the leader of Germany during World War II. Students read five brief documents and had to rank them in priority of helpfulness with their action in assisting the Nazi party to consolidate power. Although, the task was challenging and supported discussion, many of the students were unclear about how to complete the task. An earth science discussion had students conflicted about their responses on the topic of density and whether oils density is higher or lower than water since it floats in water. Although students read their definition and used their calculator to solve several equations, the concept of density was misunderstood by the majority of students. Few students took advantage of their partners to discuss or clarify their understanding.
- The provision of opportunities for students to engage in student-to-student dialogue is a belief held by a majority of the teachers. An observation of a Socratic seminar discussion based on the play *Romeo and Juliet*, was led by students who agreed and disagreed with each other about who is to blame for their death. The discussion was mediated by students who were able to demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation. This level of thinking and discussion was not observed throughout most other classes visited, where the teacher dominated the discussions and brought students into the learning with low-level questioning and clarification. Most often, one-word answers were necessary to respond to the teacher.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula and inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Limited feedback is provided to students and teachers regarding student achievement supporting opportunities for effective adjustments such that students learning needs are met.

Supporting Evidence

- Confirmation of student comprehension during instruction was collected by some teachers through the use of a checks for understanding checklist. However, the level of understanding justifying a check or numerical value was unclear and not completed for all students. Additionally, students are not made aware of their level of understanding as it was collected to help inform them of their progress towards meeting their needs.
- Feedback to students is provided in a minimalistic manner, where much of the feedback does not offer the opportunity for students to develop a sense of understanding toward areas for improvement. For example, many returned student work samples have a raw score (83% or 16/16), check, or a superlative such as "excellent," "wonderful," or "amazing" written on it with no more specific actionable feedback. Some teachers have written next steps on the scored rubric sheet attached to bulletin boards on the classroom walls. For example, a math classroom had a board with several samples of student activity sheets posted including next steps attached to the assignment. Some next steps written out included, "be more specific when defining variables" and "answer each question." One student shared, "when you do poorly, you know, but if you get a check, it means I did a good job." When students were asked if they understood what they could do to achieve a higher score on any of their assignments, most could not explain or provide work samples that had been graded with any form of feedback on it.
- Teachers are provided assessment results from various pre- and post-assessments and have access to a shared Google assessment platform data collection spreadsheet. Teachers and administrators use the spreadsheet to track students' academic, attendance, credit, progress towards graduation, credit gaps, and college readiness amongst other variables. However, the data is not provided or presented in a manner that supports guiding students an awareness of their achievement. Some students communicated they did not know if they had to take the Regents exams at the end of their current course.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate a culture of expectations that are connected to a path to college and career and offer ongoing feedback to help families and students.

Impact

Families and students understand progress and are prepared for expectations that support their preparation for the next level of education/career opportunities.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are given opportunities to attain college credit through AP courses and College Now course offerings. Data shows benchmarks for college and career preparatory courses and college readiness have been met and exceeded for the 2016-2017 school year. Additionally, final stages for accreditation of International Baccalaureate (IB) status are near complete.
- Students shared, they meet with their college advisor and use the online program, *Naviance*, to help them identify their areas of post-secondary school studies. One ELL student referenced he had been encouraged to further investigate civil engineering as a career choice. However, several underclassmen, were not able to articulate a similar awareness of college and career readiness being communicated to them, although they were discussing and planning for the SAT exam. All students receive a grade tracker periodically (about twice a year), informing them of their current data in reference to attendance, grade averages, transcript average, required regents for graduation, and complete credit accumulation. The tracker is color coded to visually represent college ready (blue), on track (green), below track (yellow), and off track (red).
- Parents communicated they are in full support of the efforts the school makes to offer their child “a better chance.” Parents, along with their child, attend workshops related to their child’s future learning and life after high school including information sessions on Advanced Placement programs and English writing skill workshops. Parents also shared they have been an integral part of the discussions leading to the IB program accreditation so their children are “more than just college ready... [but can become a] global community leader.”
- Preparation for success by students on assessments is performed through early administration of pre-assessments, so students can learn where their strengths and weaknesses are. Students and parents alike felt the extra-help opportunities offered to them after school and on weekends have led to increased high expectations and academic success. For example, a student who passed the regents in Algebra 2 Trigonometry retook the Regent’s exam and received a higher grade so his transcript would indicate a score which confirms he is college ready. Additionally, students who took the January English and/or global 1 Regents and were not successful, had their schedule structured so that they could retake the Regents exams again in June with a course specifically designed to “drive a change in content so they can improve.”

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that have strengthened teacher instructional capacity and promoted the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership.

Impact

Inquiry practices coherently strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Small Learning Communities (SLC's) are established for teachers to focus on improving school-wide instructional goals coherently across grades and content areas. Each week, teams of teachers focus on the evaluation of student work samples using the WITsi approach. During one inquiry meeting, teachers evaluated individual student work for trends, wonderings, and findings and if students could properly utilize sentence expansion strategies across various content areas. Teachers shared out their findings following a review of student samples and recorded the data on a tracking sheet. Teachers use these findings and practices to improve their pedagogy towards an inclusive model where all students can be brought into "the sphere of success." Specifically, teachers stated the inquiry meetings allow them the opportunity to "slow down their processing and focus instruction on individual students to go more in depth."
- Inquiry teams design lessons where strategies become embedded in the curricula so the students can see common trends and be more reflective with the consistency of their instructional experiences, ultimately yielding an increase in student achievement. For example, the arc of math inquiry work focused on students who did not pass the math regents. Through the impact of inquiry, teachers within the department applied the same series of interventions, which led to a higher pass rate on the Integrated Algebra Regents.
- Teachers engage in collaborative intervisitations to identify effective pedagogical practices they can implement to improve their own instruction. Additionally, actionable feedback is provided to the host teacher so they can strengthen their instructional capacity. A review of intervisitation outcome forms, highlight actionable next steps where students engage in discussion among themselves more than previously, so they can learn from one another. Another example offers feedback to have each group work on a different paragraph so students can create an entire essay. Teachers noted these practices have improved their instruction and are a direct result of their inquiry work focused on moving students' academic achievement.
- Professional development sessions are presented by staff to their colleagues through professional development Tuesday's and "train the trainer" opportunities. Teachers said they share and collaborate ideas and are encouraged to engage in practices that lead to increased student achievement. For example, the intervisitation protocol was suggested by a teacher and implemented among many staff members. Additionally, math teachers on the renewal cohort developed approaches to target student skills for success on the new Algebra Regents.