



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Washington Irving High School

High School 460

**40 Irving Place
New York
NY 10003**

Principal: Bernardo Ascona

Dates of review: April 27 - 29, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Jeffrey Fisher

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Washington Irving is a high school with 1493 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 31% Black, 62% Hispanic, 2% White and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 70.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 63% eligibility.

This large high school is organized into six learning communities, also referred to as houses, each with a House Coordinator in charge. The executive principal took up his position in September 2008.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

A dedicated principal and staff communicate a powerful vision of success at Washington Irving High School. There is a clear message to teachers, parents and students that the school will work in partnership with them to achieve academic success. As a means of achieving this success, the administration gathers data about the school's performance to take key strategic decisions backed by well-judged resource allocations to make substantial changes in its culture and the quality of education it provides. New computers and smart boards have been purchased, as the budget allows, expanding the use of technology by teachers and students and increasing the use of differentiated instruction, still in the developmental stage, to enhance independent learning.

The school has implemented a host of new programs and initiatives that have had a positive impact on instruction. Teachers are empowered through participation in the School Leadership Team to set goals for the school. Professional development has been individualized so that teachers may choose training they feel will be most helpful to them and their students. Common planning time provides teachers with an opportunity to share best practices, discuss new techniques and plan curriculum units or lessons. Curriculum mapping has been initiated to align resources and budget to student learning outcomes and to allow for flexibility in reaching struggling students. Data is used by teachers to set goals for themselves and their students. Goal setting and the monitoring of feedback in all classrooms have not yet been fully developed, however. In an effort to improve the graduation rate, a new credit recovery program called Plato has been introduced. This program allows students to work online, making up credits needed for graduation. Additionally, there is a determined effort to improve the attendance rate, which remains just above 70%, by home visits and daily phone calls to parents. The effects of these two programs remains to be seen but parents say that they appreciate being contacted on a daily basis when their child is absent from school.

The school has developed a real sense of community. This is in spite of the fact that many students travel from other boroughs to attend. Deans and guidance counselors are kept aware of students' academic progress so that conferences with parents are more productive. Improved lines of communication have brought more parents back into the school which has resulted in better attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Parents speak proudly of their school and refer to themselves as partners in their children's education.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal communicates a powerful and perceptive vision of success that inspires and motivates all members of the school community.
- The school uses data to make key strategic decisions and allocate resources to support them, which is proving very effective in building the school's capacity to improve.
- The school has a well-organized curriculum that is flexibly attuned to student needs.
- A wide and varied range of assessment data is collected and analyzed very thoroughly to review student progress and plan interventions where appropriate.
- The school's systems and partnerships support students and their families very well in promoting students' personal growth and development.
- The school provides a wide range of collaborative opportunities for staff to shape the school's goals and enhance their skills and knowledge through effective individualized professional development programs.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to work with all constituencies in identifying and eliminating all possible obstacles to improving school-wide attendance.
- Ensure that short- and long-term learning goals are understood by students so that they may be articulated and shared with parents.
- Continue to improve the consistency of differentiation in classroom learning activities to meet the needs of all students, including the higher-performing students.
- Expand the use of technology by teachers and students across the whole curriculum to further enhance independent learning.

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 well developed.

Gathering data and using it to improve instruction has become part of the school culture. This is now a data-driven school, as evidenced by the progress chart in the principal's office that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each student in all core subjects. The generation and analysis of data has been strongly boosted by the recent hiring of an assistant principal for data analysis. He regularly provides the school community, including teachers, deans and guidance counselors, with individualized student information that is also aggregated to show trends and patterns, for example among all subgroups. There is collaborative analysis of student performance in Regents examinations and this shapes the instructional focus in specific subject areas. Inquiry teams in English, math, science, social studies and special education meet at least once per week and have identified the needs of all subgroups within the school. Students benefit from this flow of information because teachers are better able to analyze learning outcomes, set goals and target instruction.

Report cards and progress reports are generated for each student and provide families with data on progress twelve times a year. This is enhanced by discussions with parents at conferences or through mailed messages to the home so that families are aware of what their child has accomplished and what more needs to be done. The school is fully committed to collecting and analyzing data so that teachers, students and their parents can track progress and plan for students' next learning steps. Parents are very pleased with this new level of communication, which includes calling parents to let them know when their child is absent from school. Despite the school's efforts, which include home visits by school personnel, attendance figures remain low. The principal explains that the low attendance figure is partially due to a number of students who have dropped out of school but remain on register.

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.

Planning and the setting of goals are top priorities of the school as evidenced by the hiring of a new assistant principal for data analysis and an expanded school-wide inquiry team. Using data from summative, formative and diagnostic assessments, the inquiry team tracks trends and determines needs in order to set goals. An active school leadership team, with input from staff, students and their parents, has created an effective Comprehensive Educational Plan. The plan provides for a needs assessment, annual school goals and an action plan for accomplishing them. The plan also includes specific interim timeframes and measures to monitor and evaluate progress. Data is

analyzed in detail by teachers and administrators on a week-by-week basis. This process allows the principal and assistant principals to have a good understanding of what has been achieved and what remains to be done. Teachers are committed to ensuring the school's key goal to fulfill the identified academic and social potential of all its students is met. School goals are posted throughout the building as part of a program to build high expectations. Students speak highly of the principal who is very visible and accessible. This affords students the opportunity to discuss problems or make suggestions for school improvement.

Goals created by students in consultation with their teachers also provide students with a feeling of empowerment. However, these short-term and long-term goals are not always sufficiently detailed to support improvement or for students to articulate them to their parents. More generally, parents believe that the school is doing an excellent job of keeping them informed and providing them with information on all school matters. As a result of the increased communication consisting of progress reports, parent-teacher conferences and phone calls regarding attendance parents are better able to support their children in completing assignments, preparing for tests and fulfilling their goals.

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.

Once data has been collected and analyzed it is used in such a way to create a broad and challenging curriculum aligned with State standards. Teachers use data provided by the various sources to customize instruction for their students. The school understands the need to acknowledge what students have accomplished to this point but continues to demand even more. Charts with the goals of the school line the halls encouraging high expectations for all students. Students conference with teachers and are encouraged to set individual goals as well. At this point student goals tend to be general in nature and lack specificity and so do not always give the necessary help to students to improve their work.

Teachers take pride in their lessons and often add music or humor to thoroughly engage their students. In many classes important skills are taught with a touch of creativity. An invigorating grade 11 English class, working on comprehension and locating facts, had small groups of students moving from station to station on a fact-finding mission about life in the 1940s while jazz of the period played in the background. The addition of music helped bring the written material to life.

Differentiation of instruction is not present in all classrooms as a means of ensuring that each student's needs are being met, or of challenging students to make even greater progress. The school's focus on differentiated instruction is linked to the principal's clear understanding of a need for greater use of technology both by teachers and students. The budget is well utilized to meet the school's most pressing priorities, which has included the purchase of new computers, smart boards and computer programs such as the Rosetta Stone program. However, stocks of modern technology are still limited. The school embraces a vigorous attitude towards success and has created a flexible and well-organized curriculum. Teachers in all content areas encourage and support students through regular feedback both by written comments in their journals and by individual conferences. As a result of this individualized support students become aware of their next learning steps. The ambiance of the school is one of mutual trust and

support. This is evident in the number of students and parents who testify to a new-found love of the school. The principal has set high standards and the teachers and students are ready for the challenge.

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 well developed

A true collegial spirit is tangible in all professional relationships. The school provides for teacher workshops, intervisitations and common planning time so that teachers can share and discuss best practices. Teachers, deans and guidance counselors work collaboratively sharing information about students' progress so as to make conferences with students or their parents more personal and productive. Parents appreciate that the school provides this level of support and students feel comfortable in discussing issues with knowledgeable support staff. Additionally, the school houses a nursery to help community residents with child care needs and works closely with outside volunteer agencies such as Union Square Partnership to provide support for students through various after school programs. Students can choose tutoring or explore various special interest activities.

The principal empowers all staff to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions. Students and teachers blossom in a climate where there is no fear of failure. Daily analysis of misconceptions and problems, such as services that are not working, is an accepted part of school life, with the principal's door always open for discussion. An ongoing analysis of well-established systems to identify necessary areas of individual support through professional development exists in the school. Professional development programs are needs-led. School leaders maintain a close audit on school goals and arrange for professional development to match school needs. They are determined by data, teacher surveys, ongoing conversations and observations.

Formal and informal observations by the principal are designed to standardize instruction and ensure effective teaching practices are consistent throughout the school. Guided by the principal, there are clear templates for these classroom observations linked to teaching and learning goals. A major focus of the principal is making differentiated instruction and student group work a priority of the school. Understanding the need for developing teachers' skills in these areas, he is increasing efforts to see that these important classroom teaching techniques are implemented in all classrooms. To further enhance differentiation of instruction the administration has decided to expand the number of computers available to students.

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.

As a result of the determined leadership of the principal the school projects a sense of pride and determination. Regular scrutiny of data enables faculty members to keep a finger on the pulse of students' success and needs. Strategic decisions and the allocation of resources to support them are data driven. This has produced programs designed to build the school's capacity to improve instruction.

The administration revisits the Comprehensive Educational Plan regularly and uses it to set out goals with realistic time frames. School leaders use interim checkpoints to monitor the curriculum and make improvements as needed. Cabinet meetings focus upon progress towards established goals and content area department meetings link effectively with the guidance department to determine intervention strategies and outreach arrangements. The data analyst assistant principal, through the evaluation of credit accumulation and scholarship reports, coordinates the meticulous analysis of student and departmental performance. Students and parents alike accept responsibility for their progress based on feedback from their teachers in all subject areas. However, the goals they set with their teachers and feedback are not sufficiently specific to help them identify the next steps in learning.

Attendance remains an area of great concern. Some progress has been made in that the school has reduced the number of those absent ten or more days from one thousand to fewer than two hundred. The principal, in his first full year at the school, supported by a very dedicated and determined cabinet, has clearly been effective in initiating a wide variety of programs in a very short period of time.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|----------|----------|
| School name: Washington Irving High School | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |
| 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. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i> | | | | |
| | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 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? | | | | X |
| 1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students? | | | | X |
| 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? | | | X | |
| 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? | | | | X |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | | | | X |
| 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. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i> | | | | |
| | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 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? | | | X | |
| 2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)? | | | | X |
| 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? | | | X | |
| 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? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 2 | | | X | |

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, DYQ, 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.

| <i>To what extent do ...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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 | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 3 | | | 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.

| <i>To what extent do school leaders...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 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 |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 4 | | | | 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.

| <i>To what extent do...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 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 |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 5 | | | X | |

| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---|---|---|------------|---|----------------|
| △ | Underdeveloped | ➤ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features | ✓ | Proficient | + | Well Developed |