



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Boys and Girls High School

High School 455

**1700 Fulton Street
Brooklyn
NY 11213**

Principal: Spencer Holder

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Reviewer: Rodney Braithwaite

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Boys and Girls High School 455 is a very large urban High School with 3877 students in 2006. Enrollment is very volatile and varies considerably from year to year, there being 500 fewer students this year than last. Students come to the school from over 100 Middle Schools across the whole of New York City. Of the student population, 90.7% are Black, 7.7% are Hispanic, and the remainder belongs to a number of different ethnic groups. The number of special education students has risen rapidly in the last three years and is now over 12%, with 361 students being in self-contained classes. This is considerably higher than the average of other City schools and similar schools. Fewer than 2% of the students are English language learners, which is well below the average for similar and City schools. At 56%, the proportion of boys is higher than girls. Attendance has been steadily falling for three years and at 69% it is well below the average for City and similar schools. The school has a significant number of over-age students, at present 36%, which is still growing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides a supportive, well-maintained learning environment with a wide range of programs to promote student success.
- The principal leads by example, and has a very good understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the school.
- The cabinet and many teams of teachers in the school work very collaboratively, and have a common understanding of the wide range of information generated about the academic and social backgrounds of the students.
- Most students enjoy learning, and as they move through the school develop high expectations for their own achievement.
- All members of staff understand clearly that they are held accountable for improving their instruction and the learning of students.
- The principal is highly respected by the whole school community and is successfully managing significant changes in the school.
- Effective goal setting is used to drive student improvement through all departments.
- The administration has a good understanding of the instructional skills of teachers, and uses professional development regularly to improve them.
- The school has good links with other providers, and effectively aligns a large number of youth development and support services around the needs of students.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine, and develop further, departmental evaluations especially through being able to measure accurately improvements that have occurred.
- Explore ways in which the budget can be used to raise the number of vocational programs offered to students.
- Sharpen the way in which the school's development plan is presented, so that overall goals are more clearly identified.
- Expand the opportunities offered to students to give their views on specific issues regarding their learning.
- Raise levels of attendance.
- Ensure that all teachers become skilled and confident in their use of differentiated instruction.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Boys and Girls High School is well led by a determined and very well-respected principal who has faced many significant challenges since he was appointed two years ago. The student population has increased by a third since 2003, the number of special education students has doubled in the same time, and the freshmen entering the school come from over 100 middle schools. The whole school has dealt with these challenges well. The school provides a well-maintained learning environment which offers a wide range of effective support and programs for the needs of students. There is a shared staff goal to raise the achievement of students, and encourage them to have high expectations of themselves. Teachers and students enjoy good relationships, and a large majority of students are working hard to improve their learning. The attendance of a significant minority though, is a long-term problem. In spite of robust attendance procedures, attendance in the last six months was just over 68%, and has been falling for several years. There are many over-age students in the school, and the school realizes that at present it is not offering enough vocational courses to meet their needs.

Curriculum department teams work collaboratively throughout the school, under the effective guidance of the assistant principals, who show an accurate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of teachers' instruction skills. The school still has a number of areas to improve though. These include the need to make the schools' main goals more clearly identified in its development plan and to evaluate more consistently those improvements which take place. Students also need to be offered more opportunities to analyze and understand their learning goals in greater depth. Teachers take many opportunities to use professional development to improve their instructional skills. However, the school recognizes that the weakest aspect of teaching is the differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of all students. Self evaluation throughout the school is accurate, but it is not always clearly documented in order to inform all staff.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has made good progress in the last two years in using existing data, and generating a considerable bank of its own, in order to compare the performances of all students, classes and grades. Data collected includes individual subject data, scholarship data, cohort performance data and the data from newly introduced strategies such as those for improving reading. Many teachers are gaining in confidence in their ability to produce data and to understand how it can be used most effectively. The principal especially, with the able assistance of his department leaders, has been very pro-active in the introduction of new data systems. The school is regularly analyzing, at the end of each marking period, the progress of all ethnic groups, special education students, the small number of English language learners, and male and female students. As a result, for

example, in presentations by the principal, all staff have been made aware that in all grades, girls are exceeding boys by up to 10% in scholarship passes. Data is also being used to show that the pass rate is weakest in grade 10.

The school also produces data, as far as possible, to compare its performance with other similar schools. It finds difficulty in doing this as there are few schools which have such a range of challenges. These include the lack of Title 1 funding for many years, constant large fluctuations in the student enrollment, very low levels of achievement on entry to the school and increasing difficulties with attendance. In spite of this, the school is producing data showing that it is steadily improving its comparative position in achievement against other schools.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

All department leaders and other members of the administration, consistently guided by the principal’s high expectations and exhortations, set demanding and measurable goals which are regularly evaluated. Examples of these are, to raise the graduation rate by 5% by 2008, and to increase Regents scholarship for both general and special education students, also by 5% by 2008. Other frequently analyzed goals are to increase the performance index in English language arts and mathematics, so that all groups of students make adequate yearly progress. The school measures progress through detailed timeframes, and is able to identify how every student is progressing towards the goals set for them. All staff are involved, and they are especially effective in guidance counseling which takes into account the data collected on attendance and social factors which affect academic achievement. This is being particularly effective in helping the performance of those students most in need, such as special education students and those with low levels of achievement when they start at the school.

Students more than ever are aware of the high expectations the school has for them, and many share them. They are eager to reach their improvement goals, but are not sufficiently informed in understanding their specific measurable learning targets. Parents are given every opportunity to receive and share information about their children. Most do this, and there is a good partnership between the school and concerned parents.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The selection of the curriculum is based soundly upon the continual use of interim and long-term data about the needs of a constantly changing student population. Data has indicated, for example, widespread reading weaknesses in students entering the school in grade 9. This has led to several new strategies, especially directed at male students, designed to raise achievement in English language arts and support the school’s improvement plans. This has resulted in a steady acceleration in student learning. Teachers know very clearly that they are held accountable for improving their instruction

and student outcomes. The administration has faced some small resistance to changes introduced, and to the high demands being placed on teachers, but this has decreased as teachers have become more aware of the improvement goals of the school. Some teachers, for example, have not taken easily to the need to develop differentiated instruction for the individual needs of all students. Professional development is helping to improve teacher confidence in this area. The budget has been used well to provide resources for improvement in student achievement in science for example. However, the school has found difficulty in offering older students sufficient vocational training, due to insufficient resources. This has resulted in their poor attendance. The school's development plan closely details staffing and scheduling decisions for pupil needs, through the effective use of its data.

There are good relationships throughout the school between staff and students. Students are well engaged in their learning. They appreciate especially the efforts of staff to prepare them for the future, and the many opportunities they have for counseling and mentoring with trusted adults. Student attendance is a continual problem for the school. Many students are good attendees, but there is a hard core of students with poor attendance and lateness records. This is in spite of the school having a high number of rigorously applied procedures and good records of attendance. There are significant issues about the accuracy of enrollment data, concerning some over-age students, and some of the large transient student population.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school staff has a strong commitment to improving achievement for all its students. The principal makes it clear that selection of staff must be based on them having high expectations for their students in all aspects of their school lives. Teachers are expected to continually improve their gathering and use of data. They must also demonstrate a willingness to take regular opportunities for professional development, in order to improve their skills. Nearly all teachers accept that collaboration in these areas is essential to meeting the schools' goals for achievement. Many have already been involved in training in the better application of data analysis, assessment procedures and how to effectively evaluate student homework and portfolios. Teachers are also involved in improving peer-evaluation through classroom intervisitations and collaboration on a daily basis.

The principal makes regular visits to classrooms, and his judgments on the strengths and developmental areas of teacher's instruction are very accurate. His evaluations of teachers are received very positively because his own instructional skills, especially with special education students, are widely admired. In such a large school though, with over 200 teachers, he cannot visit as many classes as he would like. The assistant principals have good skills in analyzing instruction, and are regularly giving their instruction evaluations to the principal, as well as guiding improvement and professional development in their own departments. There is good communication between departments about goals and results, which is helped by the good planning and revision of plans by the many teams in the school.

The principal has shown he is not afraid of introducing widespread change, for example, in his determination to hold all staff accountable for improvement in the achievement of all categories of students. The administration works very hard and successfully to ensure that

the whole school runs smoothly in spite of its size, and that procedures are known, understood and followed by all. Academic goals are the driving force of the school's youth-development strategies. The school offers mentoring to every student by a large number of committed teachers, who are able to guide students to the support they need. This includes the use of many partners to the school such as the Arthur Ashe academy which helps to develop students' skills in science.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has made some progress in the last two years in developing its plans for evaluating student achievement and improvement, and is recognizing where there are weaknesses in teaching practices and its improvement plans. However, because the school is large and the overall school development plan is not coherent enough for all leaders and staff to understand the whole-school goals, there is a tendency for departments to work separately. This leads to inconsistency across departments in how interim goals are set, measured and then acted upon, in order to reach original goals. All leaders are setting targets and holding their staff accountable for reaching them, but there is not a common approach as yet, especially in measuring improvement. There is a wealth of data used by all departments to compare individual student progress in different curriculum areas. Many interventions take place after diagnostic assessments, which are now being made on a regular basis. This is particularly evident in the goal setting to improve, as rapidly as possible, the low achievement levels of the freshmen when they enter the school. In this case, the administration has made successful decisions on the realignment of practices and resources in order to improve reading levels, especially of boys.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Boys and Girls High School 455	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	