



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Public School 94 Manhattan**

**442 East Houston Street  
New York  
NY 10002**

**Principal: Ronnie Shuster**

**Dates of review: March 14 – 15, 2007  
Reviewer: Jeffery Plumb**

# Content of the report

## **Part 1: The School Context**

Information about the school

## **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

## **Part 3: Main Findings**

Overall evaluation

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

## **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 94 Manhattan serves 234 special education students with a range of needs from kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade on one main co-location site with general education students and on two co-location off-sites. There are two distinctive student populations. One consists of students with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties who follow the mandated curriculum and take standardized tests. The other has alternate assessment students and is made up of autistic students and a few students with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are 18 classes for students with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties, nine classes for autistic students and one class for vision impaired students. In addition there are two inclusion classes (one elementary and one middle school).

Students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with 50% Hispanic, a further 40% Black, 6% White and 4% from Asian and other backgrounds. There are 18 English language learners which, at 8%, is below the average for the City. The dominant home language is Spanish. There are very significantly more boys than girls.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal provides a clear vision and sense of direction for the school.
- The school gathers and uses data well to identify support for students with mental health difficulties.
- There are good inclusion opportunities for students on the site shared with Public School 61.
- The partnership with Columbia University Teachers' College is helping to drive up standards in writing.
- Speech therapists develop the skills of the paraprofessionals who work with autistic students in the use of the picture exchange communication system.
- Data is utilized to re-align instruction in English language arts to raise student achievement.
- There are positive working relationships amongst faculty members.
- Budget decisions are based on student needs.
- The instructional lunch recess program supports autistic students well.

### What the school needs to improve

- Put robust management systems in place to follow through initiatives and ensure that the assistant principals are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have autonomy to make decisions.
- Put a student council in place and ensure students are given the opportunity to engage in shaping behavior policy.
- Work in partnership with the principal on site PS 188 to increase inclusion opportunities and gain access to the internet café and the library.
- Ensure consistency in student conferencing across all English language arts classes.
- Ensure that all teachers and paraprofessionals implement the school's behavior policy consistently to reduce the number of incidents which trigger suspensions.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

Overall, the school gathers and uses data proficiently to serve its student population. Service for inclusion is better on the co-located site with Public School 61 (PS 61) than that with Public School 188 (PS 188). The principal strives to achieve inclusion for her students. Recent improvements in gathering and using data to improve behavior and raise student achievement make this a proficient school. However, management systems are not secure enough to ensure improved practice consistency is consistently applied. Teachers are supportive of each other and enjoy working in this school. There is excellent practice in this school, but it is not sufficiently shared to bring the pockets of mediocre practice in line with the best. With the expertise of the behavior and academic coaches, the link with Columbia University Teachers' College and the desire of the assistant principals to take on more autonomy in driving up standards, this school is well positioned to improve.

Energy and commitment goes into reducing the number of incidents which trigger suspensions. Recent decisive actions are beginning to bring about improvement, but too little attention has been focused on consulting with students about issues and changes. In addition, the co-location on the site with PS 188 has limited inclusion opportunities for the District 75 students. This causes frustration for a dedicated and hard working staff and impedes learning opportunities for vulnerable students, many of whom have aspirations to leave District 75 and access a less restrictive learning environment. The principal's commitment and determination to ensure that as many as possible of the students move to general education settings and graduate with a high school diploma is challenged by current arrangements. However, she persistently initiates type 3 interventions to move students on to a general education setting.

### 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 gathers a wide range of soft and quantifiable data to build a picture of each student. The administration recognizes the importance of tracking student progress over time. Individual education plans are reviewed with each report card. Although the importance of tracking progress is recognized, the practice of doing so is inconsistent.

Data on ethnic groups is not gathered. However, the differences between the needs of English language learners and those speech difficulties linked with special needs are identified well. Data is gathered on students' mental health needs. It is used effectively to support them. Performance data based on gender is used to group boys who click well together and also to ensure that girls in the school are supported well.

Test results for standardized students are compared against similar schools and decisive actions are taken to drive up standards. Discovery of a weakness in writing has resulted in the implementation of the Wilson program. However, scheduling difficulties across two sites pose difficulties for teachers who have been trained in conferencing students to be able to turnkey what they have learned with other teachers. Consequently, there is inconsistency in the conferencing model across both of these sites.

**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.**

Collaborative structures exist to include all staff in setting the long-term school goals. However, the goals in the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan are end-of-year goals without interim steps along the way to achieve them. The administration use data to set goals with interim steps, and timeframes to achieve them, but too many teachers do not have ownership of them. There is clarity about the immediate goals which drive the whole school community. They focus on reducing the number of incidents and improving challenging behavior. However, students are not sufficiently engaged in setting their behavior goals and the agreed behavior policy is not consistently applied by all staff.

Based on performance data the recently launched writing and reading programs are aimed at improving achievement in English language arts. Collaborative teams of teachers and related service providers meet regularly to discuss data on students with the greatest barriers to learning and set goals to raise their achievement and best service their needs. A particular strength is the way in which data is used to set goals for students with severe mental health difficulties. However, plans put in place to reach these goals are not always consistently followed through.

Teachers have high expectations of students. Information provided for parents is of good quality, but despite considerable effort, the school finds it very difficult to get parents to come into school and to engage them in the setting goals for their children. Some actions, such as the hiring of a behavior coach, are very recent and it has not yet been possible to evaluate their impact, but they bode well for the future. Data is gathered to identify what triggers incidents and is used to manage change, for example the use of the lunch recess. However there is no formal structure to consult older students on the changes being made.

**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.**

Overall, data from students’ individual educational plans is used to plan flexibly to meet their curriculum needs. Standardized students follow the mandated curriculum to prepare them for City tests, but in addition they experience a creative talent program based on data about their interests. However, therapy is separate from curriculum rather than integral to it and the school has not developed specific emotional literacy units based on their primary behavioral needs. Curriculum planning for alternate assessment students focuses on developing their communication skills. Planning of sensory and tactile experiences to accelerate the learning of autistic students is developing well. Teachers of alternate

assessment students are held to account through a weekly scheduled meeting; but logistics make it difficult for the teachers of standardized students to meet regularly. Consequently, planning and differentiation of instruction for emotional difficulty students is inconsistent throughout the school.

Budget, staffing and scheduling decisions are driven by data based on student needs. An instructional and positive behavior coach has been hired to reduce incidents and an academic coach has been hired to drive up standards in writing and is beginning to accelerate student learning. Based on lesson observations, staff are moved and used to better benefit students. The decision to move a social studies teacher to teach music, based on his effectiveness in engaging students' interest through the use of music in his social studies lessons, has paid dividends. Concentration and learning in his combined music and information technology lessons are outstanding. Intense academic instruction is scheduled for the morning to accelerate learning.

Engagement of students in instructional programs is inconsistent through and across sites, but is satisfactory overall. It is better on the site shared with PS 61, where students are more easily included with general education students and use the same resources. On the co-located site with PS 188, District 75 students are not able to access the internet café or use the library. This has an adverse impact on their engagement in learning. In addition teachers within subjects and population groups vary their practice. Most conference with students effectively, but some do not conference at all. Most lessons are challenging, interesting and fun, as observed in a standardized class where the teacher used the interactive whiteboard to motivate students in writing about sharks. The instructional lunch program for autistic students is very effective in promoting their independence and communication skills. However, some English language arts instruction lacks pace and does not sufficiently motivate all students in the class to learn.

Overall, staff respect students and have a good knowledge and understanding of their complex needs. However, a few faculty members are out of their depth in managing very challenging behaviors and, on rare occasions, inappropriate handling of situations triggers incidents. Students able to vocalize say that they have an adult they trust in school, but there is no school council through which they can formally express their views. The school works very hard to support non-verbal students in communicating their needs independently. Speech therapists skillfully train staff to develop students' independence and communication skills. Attendance has a high profile. Absence patterns are monitored and robust procedures are in place to follow up on students who are away from school. As a result attendance is better than in similar schools.

**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 proficient**

The principal's vision, direction, creative thinking and commitment to achieve the best for all students are respected by staff and students. However, the lack of robust systems to see initiatives through sometimes means teachers are not always clear about expectations. In particular they are concerned about insufficient common planning time. Administrators work together well, but the assistant principals are not always clear whether or not they have the autonomy to make decisions on their feet without referring back to the principal. Consequently the school does not always run smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

Most teachers have been in the school for many years. New teachers and paraprofessionals are hired for their enthusiasm to work with special education students rather than their ability to use data. There is no formal system to audit teachers' skills. Nonetheless, the main areas of professional development are based on data about student needs. Recent training has focused on equipping paraprofessionals who work with autistic students to become more confident in using the adopted picture exchange communication system. The weakness in the system is finding common time for groups of teachers of distinct populations to come together so that those who have attended courses can turnkey what they have learned. All staff have been trained in therapeutic crisis intervention, but there is inconsistency in implementation of the strategy.

The principal observes lessons and feeds back to teachers on how to improve instruction. There is an effective buddy peer model of intervisitation and teachers can go on visits to a partner school to observe lessons and improve their practice. Collaborative teams meet to revise plans and instruction, based on students' needs. From such a collaborative meeting, mathematics groups were set up using achievement data. All consider this a good strategy, but management of the arrangement is not sufficiently robust and the students state that transition to their mathematics lesson after lunch too often results in poor behavior on the part of a few students. Consequently they say, 'Our mathematics lessons do not get off to a good start'. Teams meet and revise plans based on data, but systems to carry actions through are not always sufficiently clear to teachers.

Partnerships with outside bodies are very effective in supporting students in achieving their academic goals. For example, the excellent link with Queens Children's Psychiatric Center supports students with mental health difficulties in reaching their academic goals exceptionally well. There are excellent links with the New York City Police Department.

**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.**

By its very design the school Comprehensive Education Plan does not facilitate monitoring and evaluating goals throughout the year because its goals are end of year goals with no interim steps along the way. However, its immediate plans driven by the focus on reducing the number of serious incidents are frequently reviewed and revised to bring about improvement. The error has been in not sharply scoping the views of the older students about the goals to improve the situation. This has caused anger, frustration and a lack of confidence on the part of these youngsters in the system.

For standardized students interim diagnostic assessments take place three times a year. Hard questions are asked and changes are made based on the findings from these assessments to raise achievement. Students' interim and final academic goals are regularly modified. Brigance assessments are used regularly to set and re-set academic goals for autistic students. This is a school which asks questions and asks them again and again about how well it is doing, but it has not paid sufficient attention to asking questions of its primary customer, the students. During the review it recognized the importance of seeking the views of students about how to reduce the number of serious incidents and use their constructive views to influence planning to improve behavior throughout the school.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>SCHOOL NAME: Public School 94M (PS 94)</b> | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| <b>Quality Score</b>                          |   | X |   |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>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.</b>   | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| 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"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>                                 |   |   | 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"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul> |   | 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"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>                       |   |   | 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 |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>  |   | 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.

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|--|---|---|---|
| <b>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.</b> | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| 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 |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>   |   | X |   |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>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.</b>   | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| 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 |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>   |   | X |   |
| <b>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.</b>   | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| 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 |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>   |   | X |   |
| <b>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.</b>   | ∅ | ✓ | + |
| 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 |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>   |   | X |   |