

**Manhattan Theatre Lab High School**

**Manhattan Theatre Lab High School**

**High School 283**

**6 Edgecombe Avenue**

**Manhattan**

**NY, 10030**

**Principal: Colleen Kidda**

**Dates of review: May 24 - 26, 2006**

**Reviewer: Mary Summers  
Cambridge Education**

# Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

## Content Of The Report

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

Background information about the school

### **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

### **Part 3: Main Findings**

What is the school's overall performance

How well does it meet New York City's evaluation criteria

Other key observations

### **Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary**

# Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

## Part1: The School Context

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Manhattan Theatre Lab was founded in September 2004. It currently caters for 174 students in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. Students come mainly from Black or Hispanic backgrounds. Most start in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with very low levels of attainment in English and mathematics. Many also have significant emotional and behavioral problems. All have free school lunches. The school offers electives in Theatre Studies, including drama, set and costume design, drama, lighting and dance. Thirteen per cent of students have individual education programs (IEPs) and six per cent are in the early stages of learning English. The school is due to move to a permanent facility before the start of the new academic year. The new principal took up the position in November 2005.

# Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

## Part 2: Overview

### What The School Does Well

- The principal has an accurate view of the teaching in the school and is beginning to effect improvement.
- The curriculum is geared well towards meeting students' interests in the performing arts.
- Students show enthusiasm for dance, drama and singing and reach good standards in their performance.
- Leadership team meetings provide a useful forum for open debate on school development matters.
- Links with the Roundabout Theater enable students to learn from skilled performers and work within a professional setting.
- Some useful work has been carried out with parents to help them support their children more effectively at home and at school.

### WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- Implement a clear system of rewards and sanctions to make students more responsible for their behavior and support teachers' management of students in class.
- Tighten up systems to monitor tardiness and attendance; collect data efficiently so that patterns can be identified and appropriate action taken.
- Track students' achievements carefully to quickly identify underachievement; ensure data is used to identify areas of the curriculum which are in need of improvement and that teachers use information about students' ongoing progress to meet their needs more effectively in lessons.
- Encourage teachers to use a range of teaching strategies and plan more practical and relevant activities to engage students' interest and concentration.
- Develop clear plans to drive forward school improvement; make sure that staff and students are involved in formulating these plans, checking their implementation and evaluating their effectiveness.

# Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is an undeveloped school.**

The principal has made some improvements over a short space of time but there remains much to do to ensure that students receive an effective education within a positive and productive learning environment.

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

**Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is overall undeveloped.**

The school is in the early stages of collecting data about individual students' performance. Termly report cards are issued showing students' grades but there is as yet no system of compiling that data to show an ongoing picture of students' progress from term to term.

Few teachers are monitoring students' learning on a day-to-day basis. Even where this does occur, there is little acknowledgement of students' different learning needs during lessons. Consequently some students find the work too easy and some find it too difficult. Students report that few teachers spend time helping them individually in lessons, when they find the work demanding.

The progress of special education students and English language learners is not monitored carefully enough. In some cases their individual education plans have not been received from their previous schools. Some support is offered to help them deal with personal and emotional problems but there is not enough focus on supporting and tracking their academic achievements in class.

**Quality Statement 2: 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 undeveloped.**

Despite the difficulties in compiling data, some good work has been done recently to identify general underachievement. In the spring term assessments, about one third of the students failed three or more classes. Letters were sent home and about 20 parents contacted the school to see how they could support their children further. In some cases counseling was initiated to support the students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Conferences are held twice a year to keep parents informed about their children's

## Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

progress.

Further good work has been done to involve parents more effectively in the school and in their children's education. The parent co-ordinator has run workshops to help parents communicate better with their children and support their behavior more effectively.

Through checking termly assessments, the school has identified students who are underachieving in English and mathematics. The school has organized tutoring classes during the last period of each day Monday to Thursday. Unfortunately many students cut these classes, thus falling further behind. Students who do attend often progress well, because the smaller numbers in the class mean they receive more individual support.

The school has no clear shared goals for improvement either in terms of whole school improvement or individual student achievement. Leadership team meetings are well organized with a clear agenda and provide a good forum to decide upon target areas and how to implement, monitor and evaluate improvement.

**Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

**This area of the school's work is overall undeveloped although there are some proficient features.**

A theatre based curriculum attracts students who want to extend their skills in the performing arts. The core curriculum is covered in the morning and the electives in the afternoon enable students to work on set and costume design, lighting and sound as well as on individual and group performance. Students' choice of elective is limited however by the numbers each class can accommodate. Dance is a popular option due to its high quality instruction, and some students are unable to be included and have to take options in which they are not really interested. This often shows up in the low grades they achieve in termly assessments.

A good range of visits contributes to students' developing understanding and skills in performing arts. These include regular visits to the Roundabout Theatre where students perform and see professionals in action.

Teaching varies considerably. The best lessons are characterized by teachers varying their teaching strategies and providing a good range of practical and interesting activities. One such lesson involved students researching vocabulary associated with British Imperialism in India, then sharing their definitions with the class. A quick fire question and answer session allowed students to explain their ideas and extended their understanding. Students were engaged and responded especially well to the clear time limits given by the teacher. Most of the teaching, however, lacks these positive qualities.

The principal monitors lessons regularly and this is beginning to show signs of success. Points for development are given but these need to be limited to one or two so that teachers can concentrate on the most important development points. Peer observation is also showing early signs of effectiveness.

Student attendance is low and tardiness is common. The beginning of the school day is haphazard and does not set a good tone for the remainder of the day. More rigorous

## Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

systems are required to record absence and tardiness so that specific problems can be identified and targeted quickly.

Unacceptable behavior is common throughout the school. Teachers often struggle to cope with this because there is no clear behavior policy that details expectations and identifies rewards and sanctions.

**Quality Statement 4: 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 overall undeveloped.**

The school has encountered several changes in staffing since its foundation in September 2004 and this has contributed to the difficulties it has met in establishing clear systems and procedures. At present, the focus is on providing the necessary classes and on containing and managing students on a day-to-day basis.

The new principal is working hard to try to ensure that the school day runs smoothly. It is evident that some improvement has occurred since she began but more rapid development is hindered by the lack of team work in the school. Individuals are working alone with little reference to one another and more needs to be done to create a positive working environment for students and for staff. There is not yet a firmly established whole school vision to which everyone subscribes.

**Quality Statement 5: 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 undeveloped.**

Structures to evaluate students' success are limited to mid and end of term grades and tests. By the time underachievement is identified students have often fallen even further behind. Most teachers recognise which students are finding it difficult to keep up with the class and which find the work too easy. They know this from homework assignments and from reviews of lessons. They need to be encouraged to use this vital information to plan their lessons to meet the needs of their students more precisely.

Priorities for improvement should be identified and plans drawn up, in consultation with representatives of the school community. Plans need to include carefully constructed monitoring procedures as well as systems to evaluate effectiveness at specific points during the implementation process. Clear success criteria should be noted which should be related directly if possible to improving students' achievement.

# Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

## Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

<b>Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and                      (2) progressing over time,                      on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standards-based,</li> <li>• consistent across students,</li> <li>• capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice,</li> </ul> <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the performance of different students to be compared, and</li> <li>• learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified.</li> </ul>	<b>X</b>		
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>	<b>X</b>		
<p>1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>	<b>X</b>		
<b>Quality Statement 2: 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>	o	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>	<b>X</b>		
<p>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 warranting attention.</p>	<b>X</b>		
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>	<b>X</b>		
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>		<b>X</b>	
<p>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</p>	<b>X</b>		

## Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

<b>Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.	X		
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.	X		
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.	X		
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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	
3.6 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	
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.	X		
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.	X		
3.9 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>Quality Statement 4: 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>	0	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.	X		
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.	X		
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.	X		

## Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

Quality Statement 5: 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.	O	✓	+
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 reaching stated goals.	<b>X</b>		
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.	<b>X</b>		
5.3 Information generated by interim 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.	<b>X</b>		
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.	<b>X</b>		