

**Talent Unlimited School**

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NY 10021**

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# **Talent Unlimited 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**

## **Talent Unlimited School**

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

#### **Information about the school**

Talent Unlimited has 413 students on roll in Grades 9 through 12. Of these 232 are in grades 9 and 10. 189 students are eligible for free state lunches. This academic year 12 students have special educational needs and four qualify for support for their English language skills. Students come from the range of ethnic backgrounds.

# Talent Unlimited School

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Students attain high standards in their performing arts programs and academic studies.
- Students' maturity and self-confidence, and their very good behavior and relationships are developed very effectively by the school.
- Students learn well. They are interested, focused on their studies, engaged with learning and able to collaborate with others very effectively.
- Teaching is good and promotes learning successfully. Careful planning, very positive relationships, good subject knowledge and high expectations all mean that students are highly motivated to succeed.
- Leadership is good. There is a strong sense of shared goals and a determination to provide students with high quality experiences.
- The school reflects on its work well and takes appropriate action to address areas that need improving. This is one of the reasons why good progress has been made in improving standards in mathematics and science.
- There is a good balance between the academic and performing arts curriculum: as a result the school achieves its mission of "...the integration of rigorous performing arts and academic curricular."
- There is a strong school ethos that values students as individuals and as members of the community, and expects the most of them.
- Teachers know their students well through a good range of formative and summative assessments. As a result interventions are effective in helping students realize their potential.
- Links with external partners extends the range and depth of students' experiences effectively.

### What the school needs to improve

- More could be done to use a range of data and information to help gain a picture of students' progress and achievements both individual and school wide. This includes systematic assessment program to identify students' progress more rigorously
- Develop further the range of strategies and techniques to evaluate what is working well and what could be improved and document the outcomes. Here, there is good information about individual students but less about how groups of students compare with other schools.
- Continue the work on writing across the curriculum. This is already having a positive impact on students' attainment and has the potential to raise writing standards further.
- Continue to develop the Advisory program and the good support this provides for students.

## Talent Unlimited School

### Part 3: Main Findings

#### Overall Evaluation

**This is a well-developed school, with some areas for development.**

**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 aspect of the schools work is proficient.**

The school uses a good variety of data and information to monitor students' performance and the progress they make towards realizing their individual potential. Data has been used well to identify weaknesses in mathematics and science performance, for example. As a result the school has been able to improve the quality of instruction and develop the curriculum in these subjects to better meet the needs of students. In both academic areas grades have risen significantly: the percentage of students reaching the required standard rose from 19% in 2001 to 91% in 2005.

One of the major strategies for monitoring progress and performance is through the grading assignments. This constant validation of how well students are doing is a central theme of the school's work: it provides teachers with data about performance and gives students feed back about their work and what areas they need to improve. In English Language Arts, for example, the grading of papers is particularly well-developed and comments guide students to the next level of their work.

While test data and grading information is used on an everyday basis to monitor students' performance and their progress, information is also collected more informally through discussion with students and between teachers. This informal gathering of information is broadly well-developed because it gives teachers a good understanding of individual student's progress and how well they are doing. Moreover, it is an essential tool for the performing arts subjects where monitoring of performance and progress is, by definition, more subjective, relying on the expertise of faculty and evaluation of performance.

This work is well-developed in many ways, particularly in analyzing students' performance, using the data to identify students who are "at risk" and taking effective action to raise performance. However, the range of data and information could usefully be extended to include broader comparisons across classes and the school. This would help gain a broader picture of students' progress and achievements and enable the school to build further on the good work already being carried out.

**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.**

## Talent Unlimited School

### **This aspect of the schools work is well-developed.**

School leaders, faculty and guidance counselors work together closely to ensure that the needs of all students are met well. The school has a well-developed process for identifying students most in need of improvement: attendance figures; test scores; and assignment grades are all used as indicators. However, teachers know their students well and the school also uses this knowledge well to identify those at risk. Most often these are students who show behavioral issues that blocks their performing arts or academic progress:

There are well-developed intervention strategies that make a real difference to students' attitudes and their personal development. Here, the advisory role of teachers makes a very significant contribution to resolving individual student's personal issues, giving them the confidence and capacity to succeed in their studies.

Other intervention strategies are also successful. In mathematics, for example, students identify their own goals as part of the semester tests. One to one tutoring is also used where it is felt necessary: where students need additional support, there is close collaboration with parents, which makes the process well-developed.

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

### **This aspect of the schools work is well-developed.**

A whole bunch of things have been done to ensure that teaching and learning, the curriculum and equipment are developed in line with students' needs. A particularly good example is the way the academic curriculum has been improved. As well as the developments in the mathematics and science departments, the school is in the middle of implementing a "writing across the curriculum" initiative to improve students' literacy skills and achievements. Interestingly, the push for this came from science where teachers found that students were having difficulty writing up their lab work. However, writing standards are only adequate and the school recognizes they could improve further.

Much has been done to ensure that staffing and resource decisions support planned developments and improvements. In science and mathematics, for example, an audit trail of the actions taken by the school to improve standards shows a clear pattern:

- data used to identify the problem;
- the appointment of new teachers;
- remodeling of the science labs;
- appointing and using the teacher mentor to develop pedagogy.

This work has been increasingly successful in raising the school's performance. Science is now working well to provide a challenging curriculum that really raises achievement. Outcomes are much improved with much higher test scores.

The school is careful to ensure that the organization of the day supports the wide range of performing arts activities. Performances, for example, are allocated sufficient time for students to get the maximum benefit and ensure that they do not clash with other subjects. This is one of the reasons for the high quality of the performing arts work in

## Talent Unlimited School

the school.

Time and personnel are allocated well to the advisory program. While the curriculum for this program is still work in progress, the use of all staff, including the principal, ensures that advisory groups are small. This is one of the reasons why teachers know their students well and give them good support.

Attendance procedures are well-developed and data is used well to identify patterns and problems.

**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 aspect of the schools work is well-developed.**

The school is led well so that there is a shared view about goals and mission. Much of this work is through informal discussions between teachers. Overall this is well-developed. For example, the writing across the curriculum initiative was developed as the result of staff discussion. Another initiative has been the advisory groups, which provide an opportunity for each student to have an adult with whom to connect. The advisory structure, in which all staff takes part, has been a strong influence on the success of the initiative. What is interesting is that advisory groups had been tried before and failed: that the program is now successful is testimony to teachers' commitment and their teamwork.

One of the strong features of the school is the way teachers collaborate to ensure that all students realize their potential. The Advisory Groups, and the writing work, are evidence of this teamwork. Another good example is the collaboration between science and social studies in developing a common format for research papers.

Similarly, teacher meetings look at students' work and hear how different subjects operate: this provides a shared experience across subjects and professional development opportunities. Lesson observations add further to these opportunities to share ideas.

As noted above the principal has used staffing to help improve standards. This demonstrates how the leadership is focused on improvement and is not complacent.

**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 aspect of the schools work is proficient.**

The school has some good procedures for evaluating students' progress and for identifying strengths, as well as weaknesses. The improvements in mathematics and science provide clear evidence that these procedures are well-developed and impact on improvement. Diagnostic tests and assessments play a central part in this process. However, the school recognizes that to identify students' progress more rigorously there needs to be greater emphasis on formative assessment. That is not to say that there is

## Talent Unlimited School

no formative assessment but it tends to be individual information rather than a systematic program that applies consistently to all students. Overall, this aspect of the school's work is proficient.

Curriculum development has been a particularly significant strategy for accelerating students' learning and progress. Mathematics, science, and to some extent English, are all good examples. In addition all groups of subjects are being encouraged to raise the bar: for example by providing more academic rigor through AP courses but ensuring that the advisory groups provide a safety net for those who might experience difficulties.

### Other key observations

One of the key characteristics of the performing arts work is the links with the school's external partners. These extend the range and depth of students' experiences well. As a result students' skills in areas such as dance, choral work and drama are often well-developed.

A key feature of the school, and one recognized by parents, is the well-developed balance between the performing arts and the academic curricular. This ensures that not only are students able to excel in their chosen performing arts – and gain an understanding of other performance areas – but also to achieve academic skills and understanding.

## Talent Unlimited School

### Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

<b>Quality Statement 1: Monitoring Performance and Progress: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated picture of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are: (1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects			<b>X</b>
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			<b>X</b>
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.		<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2: Academic Improvement Goals and Plans</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
2.1 Using data, the school sets demanding, objectively measurable, goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			<b>X</b>
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.		<b>X</b>	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 3: Instructional Programs, Practices, &amp; Arrangements; Student Engagement</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and based on the curriculum's capacity to generate useful interim data about progress towards goals.			<b>X</b>
3.2 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.			<b>X</b>
3.2 Scheduling decisions are driven by the time and resources needed to obtain and use performance and progress data, set high goals, and implement and continuously improve the school's plans for reaching stated goals.			<b>X</b>
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the time and resources needed to obtain and use performance and progress data, set high goals, and implement and continuously improve the school's plans for reaching stated goals.			<b>X</b>
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the resources needed to obtain and use performance and progress data, set high goals, and implement and continuously improve the school's plans for reaching stated goals.			<b>X</b>
3.5 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.			<b>X</b>
3.6 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			<b>X</b>
3.7 Instructional programs actively engage students.			<b>X</b>
3.8 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies exist and are routinely utilized for the purpose of achieving stated academic goals.			<b>X</b>

## Talent Unlimited School

<b>Quality Statement 4: Staff Selection, Leadership, &amp; Capacity Building</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</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.			<b>X</b>
4.2 The leadership team is respected and has capacity to effect change.			<b>X</b>
4.3 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and they are generally followed.			<b>X</b>
4.4 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including 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.			<b>X</b>
4.5 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			<b>X</b>
4.6 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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 5: Recognition, Intervention, &amp; Adjustments</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</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 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 final outcome, and the aggregate and comparative outcomes of similar plans, drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, including the revision of plans designed to be implemented again.		<b>X</b>	