



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Manhattan Hunter Science High School

High School 541

**122 Amsterdam Avenue
New York
NY 10023**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Manhattan Hunter High School was established in 2003 in collaboration with Hunter College. The school shares a site with five other schools on the Martin Luther King campus. Students in grades 9, 10 and 11 are educated here, whilst the 12th grade students are taught at Hunter College to enable them to gain a genuine pre-college experience. The school was formed to cater for average and below average students who wanted to follow a strong science based curriculum. A small number of students have special needs and around 60% have Title 1 eligibility. The school admits around 100 students to each grade level and opened with just 9th grade. The school has grown by a grade each year since then. The first cohort will graduate this summer.

As an Empowerment school it has more flexibility to make key decisions and control its resources for its school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is well respected and has established high expectations for staff and students
- The school monitors attendance rigorously, so students know the importance of attending regularly and on time
- The strong and effective partnership with Hunter College prepares students well for their college careers
- Staff know students well and offer particularly good guidance for their personal development
- A well structured intervention program enables students with recognized needs to be successful
- Clearly communicated and well established systems ensure the school runs smoothly and that the environment is safe and purposeful
- Parents are welcomed and involved as partners
- Good levels of co-operation with a neighbouring school enables both schools to share valuable resources and staff
- The school is reflective about its practices
- All teachers are committed to achieving successful outcomes for each student.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop the use of data to set objectively measurable goals
- Use data about the performance of different groups to monitor more rigorously the impact and effectiveness of instruction
- Continue to build and forge links across the curriculum to strengthen and build upon the good practice already begun in the humanities
- Continue to develop the program of professional development to extend staff expertise in the use of a range of data that will promote student achievement
- Develop the use of the school planning process to drive forward school improvement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

This relatively young school has successfully established itself as a viable and thriving educational community. Its first cohort of students will only graduate at the end of the summer term, but already the great majority of the cohort has secured an offer of at least one college place. This is a school which is still evolving and developing its systems and structures, and although the staff recognize that the school has not yet reached the pinnacle it is capable of, “we are learning as we go.” In this school, staff are not afraid to try out new ideas, test new concepts and accept that not everything they do is a final answer to the needs of the school. This open-minded approach stems from the attitudes and actions of the principal who is firmly established as a well respected figure. Although the high expectations that are apparent throughout the school begin with her, the creative and thoughtful stance taken by all staff constantly reflect the original ambition of the school that every student they admit is capable of getting a place at college.

As an Empowerment school it makes proficient use of the designated Periodic Assessment materials to generate data. As a result approximately 96% of the Class of 2007 are expected to graduate with a Regents diploma.

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 accepts students from across the city. There are no entry qualification requirements other than a commitment to and interest in science. Most students start at the school with average or below average levels of attainment. The school has begun to evolve and test systems to measure the progress of both individuals and groups. Staff have evaluated the effectiveness of the current system they are using. They recognize that it does not fulfil all their needs, and have therefore decided to stop using the system next year and move to an alternative that they believe will prove a better tool to accelerate the progress of students. They are keen to develop a rigorous system that will enable them to take the students from whatever baseline level of attainment they enter school with to higher levels than would normally be expected for average students.

All members of the faculty firmly believe that they can add significant value to the achievements of their students. They gather significant amounts of data, about the performance of students, but as yet, they are not in a position to use this information to interrogate or interpret this sufficiently to set objectively measurable goals for both groups and individuals. The school has little past data with which to compare its performance and has yet to compare its performance with those of other similar schools.

They already have a good intuitive understanding of what works well and what work less well, but more development is needed before all staff can hold themselves impartially accountable for what is most effective. One outcome of their initial evaluation has been good levels of co-operation with a neighbouring school. This partnership has enabled both schools to share valuable resources and staff. This has particularly benefited the small number of English language learners and special needs students who have been able to access extra staff and resources that the school would otherwise have not been able to afford.

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.

Everyone involved with the school already has high expectations of what can be achieved. Teachers expect all their students to graduate and the students not only know this, but also believe that with the support and guidance that they from their staff that they can do so. However, the teachers recognize that the next step is for the students to raise their personal expectations to get beyond 65% pass grade for graduation to the highest levels. This next step is even harder to achieve, and the faculty recognizes that they now need to use data about the performance of different groups of students more effectively. This will involve a more rigorous monitoring of the impact and effectiveness of instruction and a planned program of support guidance and target setting for individuals and groups of students. A well structured intervention program already enables students with recognized special needs to be successful helped and developed and as a result they are fully integrated into all classes.

The school informs parents well about the progress of their children and involves them as partners in developing their children’s achievements whenever possible. There is a keen awareness amongst the students that the sharp focus on academic achievement alongside the small size of the student body means that it is hard for them to muster a sense of school spirit. Nevertheless, staff do not wish to limit the aspirations of the students and have set in place developments that are not just confined to the academic program. The school has a good awareness that many students already come to them with a wide range of skills and talents and it offers an increasing range of arts and sports activities to engage and motivate them.

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.

One of the most significant successes of the school has been the personal guidance program. The school social worker, guidance counsellors and teachers know the students well and they offer particularly good guidance and support for their personal development. The assistant principal leads the processes to monitor attendance. The outcome of the rigorous systems employed is that student attendance is consistently high and even getting better at over 95%. Students know the importance of attending regularly and being

on time. Classes start promptly, and students understand and accept that they are responsible for getting themselves to their classes and that they should be equipped with all they need and be ready to work.

The curriculum is well aligned to the needs of the students and their academic success. Where subjects have not been successful, for instance physics, the principal has taken steps to find and appoint new teachers who are able to make a difference. She has also involved the staff in the wider decision making processes of the school by for instance involving them in budgetary decisions. The school has been particularly successful at developing its humanities program. Social studies and English language arts are designed to support and complement each other and as a result student grades are notably higher than the school's average for all subjects. The faculty recognizes this and more developments are planned.

Parents are particularly pleased by the support that their children receive and one said "Students are treated as capable viable human beings." The students are also grateful for the support they receive. They pointed out that their teachers cared for them. "When things go wrong the teachers take responsibility for it and ask themselves what they can do to put it right." There is also recognition by the students that although, "not all classes are exciting, different teachers have different approaches." This is a school where "we (the students) just work harder to get what we want."

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.

Despite operating on a shared campus, and with a split site, with the seniors attending classes at Hunter College this is a school with a clear identity. Well established systems and clear communications ensure the school runs smoothly and that the environment is safe and purposeful. The strong and effective partnership with Hunter College prepares students well for their college careers. College preparation is seen by everyone as being central to the schools remit and purpose. Students have the opportunity to earn college level credits via dual credited courses taught initially in school and for the senior year at the college. In addition during this senior year they are also exposed to the first hand experience of what it is like to be at college. It is not just the workload that they have to cope with, but also the freedoms, and the expectations of being a college student. This appears to be developing well, a one parent observed, "Their experience will serve them well for their freshman year at college."

The school's program is only now producing its first group of graduates. The principal keenly recognizes this. "We are a work in progress, anticipating our first graduating class and, as a result of the kind of reflection that will come post-graduation when we can take a step back, and look at where we have come in order to move forward." Some of this reflection has already begun. Materials have been purchased, and time has identified to continue to develop the program of professional development. There is recognition amongst the faculty that there is still a need to extend staff expertise in the use of a range of data and information about student performance. More specifically there is the clear understanding that with improved data will come a level of intelligent accountability that will promote student achievement.

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.

This is a relatively young school with a relatively young and inexperienced staff, but despite this it is already a successful school. It is also an ambitious school with a faculty that is reflective about its practices "We are going to be able to make better decisions for next year on the basis of what we have learnt so far" said one of the teachers. One element where it recognizes it must do more is in the development of the school planning process to drive forward the whole school improvement agenda. It already keenly assesses what is working well and what works less well. The leadership is able to reject elements which are less effective and there is no shortage of ideas or commitment from all the faculty.

However, the next steps will involve a more careful assessment and interrogation of the data and a systematic analysis and comparison of student progress. When this is in place it should become easier to convert the broad ambitions that already exist into even sharper goals and practices.

All the teachers are already clearly committed to achieving successful outcomes for each student. The students and their parents know this, and when these factors are combined with the powerful and effective partnerships the school has fostered, there is a recipe which has generated much good will and a thirst for even more success.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Manhattan Hunter Science High School (HS 541)	∅	✓	+
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	