



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Norman Thomas High School

**High School 620
111 East 33 Street
New York
NY 10016**

Principal: Steven M Satin

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Reviewer: Terry Turner

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Norman Thomas High School has a current enrollment of 2121 students from grade 9 through grade 12. Approximately 71% of enrolled students are Hispanic, 24% are Black, 3% are Asian and 2% are white. Approximately 25% of all students are English language learners. The proportion of Hispanic students and English language learners has increased significantly in recent years. Special education students represent 9% of the school population and most receive instruction in classrooms that are self-contained. Approximately 69% of students are Title 1 eligible, which is higher than that for similar schools and City schools.

For the past two years attendance figures have been lower than the average for similar schools and City schools. Current figures show an improvement in attendance, particularly in relation to grades 9 and 10 students. However, overall attendance is still only 83.5%. Student stability at 97.5% is a higher than that found in similar schools and City schools. The school is striving to reduce the number of suspensions, which in the past has been high.

The school is in the second year of adopting the concept of small learning communities. These communities encompass accounting; marketing; office technology; and travel and tourism. All students, including English language learners and special education students, participate in one of the communities. The federal grant to assist in this reform was achieved through the concerted effort of all staff.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is highly visible, easily accessible, and well respected by students, staff and parents.
- The school operates well on a day-to-day basis and routines are clearly understood.
- First-class lines of communication have been established between the school and home.
- The school generates an extensive amount of data that all staff are able to access through a well-developed internal system.
- The school has firmly incorporated excellent links with a variety of businesses and outside agencies.
- With the help of federal funding, the school has successfully re-organized into small learning communities that provide a wide variety of courses for its students.
- The curriculum that the school offers is innovative, stimulating and designed to meet the future needs of all students.
- For the most part, teachers are committed to providing high quality instruction and manage the behaviour of their classes effectively.
- The principal is acutely aware of the quality of instruction that takes place throughout the school.
- Attendance has improved recently, particularly in grades 9 and 10, and students feel safe and secure whilst they are on the campus.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that continued professional development relates specifically to the needs revealed by the abundance of data generated.
- Focus more rigorously on improvements in literacy across the curriculum.
- Provide a greater insight into how staff use and interpret data in order to adapt their instruction to meet the diverse needs of individual students.
- Devise and implement a cycle of monitoring and evaluation that identifies more clearly any adaptations needed in improvement plans.
- Build in systems that allow flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.
- Provide greater opportunities for staff collaboration about whole-school issues.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal is highly respected by teachers and students alike. He is continuously effecting change with the aim of enabling all students to achieve at the highest level possible. He has a clear vision for the school and is increasingly using data to inform the school's goals and targets.

The school has access to a wide range of data, staff are beginning to analyze and interpret the data in a meaningful way, and there is a resolve to maximize their use. The school is also aware of the value in using data to align instruction to serve the needs of all students in its care. Staff work well together but there are only limited opportunities for extensive staff collaboration on whole-school issues.

To a large extent, the school's data belie the optimism of the students and parents, and the self-belief of the staff. The students are overwhelmingly supportive of the variety of courses that the school offers. Parents are very pleased with the care, support and guidance given by the school. Staff are determined to provide instruction that is relevant, meaningful and stimulating. There is no feeling of complacency but there is a determination to succeed.

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 is beginning to develop effective systems for collecting and utilizing a wide range of data. Data provided by the Department of Education are transferred to the school's in-house computer system. These data are then enhanced by additional information from the school's own internal assessment systems. The composite data allow the school to track the performance and progress of individual students. For example, one data set provides information for each grade in terms of the number of students who have passed at three different levels, the number who have failed, and the number not tested. Good use is then made of this information to calculate a total score that can be compared with the safe harbor target.

The school makes good use of data to target students who require additional instruction, particularly those close to a grade level boundary. Similar analyses are conducted for ethnicity, English language learners and economically disadvantaged students. The school is determined to make good use of this information in order to meet its annual performance targets.

Performance and progress measures based on comparisons with similar schools and with the school's own past performance are undeveloped. A difference of 20 percentage points between male and female students in the most recent English language arts Regents

examination has not yet prompted further investigation, for example to look for trends or test for significance. Although student data are accessible to all staff, few teachers take advantage of this facility at present and it is left to faculty leaders to disseminate information and carry out any analyses. One of the assistant principals is currently providing good support in responding to questions raised by the data, but the school recognizes the need to improve coordination and communication of data between administration and staff.

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.

The thorough analyses of data ensure that the school has detailed knowledge of the students’ progress. This in turn enables the school to set goals for students in greatest need. This includes a significant number of students who are still only achieving at levels 1 and 2, special education students and English language learners. Results of internal tests set by teachers and scrutiny of students’ portfolios provide complementary evidence. Assistant principals and members of their department collaborate well to set goals for individuals and groups of students. Most teachers are aware of the grade levels at which their students are working. School leaders are intent on setting goals and targets that will enable students reach the next grade level or pass external examinations.

There are a number of initiatives in which staff are working well together in order to facilitate instruction and increase the rate of students’ progress. For example, mathematics and foreign language teachers are attempting to establish a way in which they can communicate more precisely with foreign language learners, and English and science teachers are endeavoring to identify common literacy skills. However, widespread collaboration amongst staff is not prevalent.

The school conveys high expectations to parents and caregivers and endeavors to ensure that they are very much involved in their children’s education. The parent coordinator keeps them fully informed by assiduously sending newsletters detailing school events and activities. Whenever possible, information is provided in the student’s home language. Parents appreciate this information and the many occasions in which they are able to discuss their children’s progress. Parents express complete satisfaction in the way that they are informed about their child’s progress, or lack of it. They also feel that they are called upon to support the goals and aspirations of the school.

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 school offers all Regents level courses to students as well as a four-year sequence in business education. The culminating course for students from all majors is the opportunity to join one of three virtual enterprise firms. The school has been very flexible and prudent in adjusting the curriculum to meet the needs of identified groups of students. For example, students taking the Regents examination are provided with an additional period

of mathematics. The school has also recognized that in mathematics overall achievement has been suppressed by the performance of bilingual students and English language learners. This has been addressed by providing, in most cases, mathematical instruction in native languages.

Students with a level 1 or 2 reading score are given a 'ramp-up for literacy' course. This is an essential component in the school's drive to improve levels of literacy and is being further promoted through the small learning communities. However, the school still has work to do in persuading all teachers that they have a responsibility for improving students' literacy skills. The principal intends to develop the concept of differentiated instruction, but, at present, teachers do not routinely align instruction to individual students' needs. As a consequence, in a number of classrooms students are not fully engaged in the learning process. However, pockets of good practice do exist in the school, for example in English language arts.

A good deal of thought and introspection has been applied to budgeting and staffing issues revealed by student data. For example, there has been a huge commitment to small learning communities. The research into acquiring the most appropriate modern technology packages was extensive and exhaustive. This is now paying dividends by providing students with unique opportunities, for example in filmmaking.

The school provides a safe environment in which learning can take place. Staff respond positively to students' academic needs and to their well-being. Students express confidence in knowing and trusting an adult in the school; parents endorse this. Student attendance is a high priority and absence triggers an immediate response. Attendance in grades 9 and 10, where the small learning communities have been established, has improved considerably. However in spite of this, overall attendance in the school at 83.5% is low.

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 has high expectations of teachers in the school. Since his appointment, a number of significant changes in staffing have been instigated to good effect. For example, there has been a greater emphasis on leadership qualities, a commitment to small learning communities and more bilingual teachers. As the school becomes more proficient at analyzing data, there is an increasing expectation that all teachers will be committed to using the information available to inform their instruction.

The use of data to inform staff training needs is undeveloped. Although the school carries out a significant amount of a professional development, it is not strategically based on issues raised through data analysis.

The principal is very visible around the campus and frequently observes instruction both formally and informally. Teachers and students are very comfortable with the principal and assistant principals entering classrooms and discussing work with them. Comments made by the principal or one of his assistants are generally well received by staff and are considered to be helpful in informing their instruction.

Good use is made of grade and subject meetings. These are held regularly in order to

evaluate students' results and to modify aspects of instruction, where this is deemed to be necessary. Opportunities for inter-class visitations within the school are welcomed by teachers and are seen as an integral part of their professional development.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Routines and procedures are clear, students are well aware of what is expected of them, and movement around the school is orderly. Most students respect school rules and feel that it is a safe learning environment. However, in spite of this, the number of recorded incidents between September 2006 and January 2007 is high at 255.

The school has successfully enlisted the help of high profile organizations and external agencies to support students in achieving academic goals. Many students have derived enormous benefit from internships or work placements in both the public and private sector. There have also been notable successes in the field of sport.

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 detailed and well-conceived Comprehensive Education Plan provides the rationale and direction for the work of the school. The principal, cabinet and staff undertake responsibility for assessing students' progress against stated goals and for revising plans when the need arises. The school makes good use of a wide range of existing information to review, revise and develop its current goals, which are based around data, leadership, scheduling, advisory and surveys. These are reflected in the recently instigated committee structure that has been developed to monitor, review and revise each of these main goals on a regular basis. This is a fairly recent innovation and has necessitated restructuring of the leadership team, and the involvement of other interested parties within the school.

Within this revised structure, there is an underlying drive through the data committee to rationalize and make more accessible the data the school already has at its disposal. The school recognizes that subject leaders and teachers could use the analysis of data more productively to revise goals and to identify more precisely where professional development would be most effective

The principal and his cabinet have high ideals for the school and its students. These aspirations are clear from the way in which the cabinet operates as a cohesive team, even though a number of staff are relatively new to the school. Assistant principals, with members of their subject departments, make periodic checks on each student's progress. This is not just to identify which students are failing to make the grade, although this is an important element in their deliberations, but also to acknowledge those who are making exceptional progress.

The implementation of small learning communities has galvanized the school into flexibly realigning practices and resources, with the aim of improving the academic outcomes of students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Norman Thomas High School (HS 620)	∅	✓	+
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	