



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Manhattan Occupational Training Center

Public School 721 Manhattan

**250 West Houston Street
New York
NY 10014**

Principal: Sheryl Watkins

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Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Manhattan Occupational Training Center is a District 75 high school that serves students who have been classified as learning disabled, developmentally delayed and/or multiply disabled by The Committee on Special Education. The school comprises the Houston Street site, two small off-site programs (Stuyvesant High School and 400 First Avenue) and two inclusion programs (Chelsea Campus High School and Legacy High School). The total enrolment is 256 students, 15 of which are inclusion students. Nine classes (28% of the school population) participate in supported community-based vocational training.

Approximately 30% of the students are English language learners, the majority from Hispanic households. In addition, 4% of English language learners come from Mandarin/Cantonese speaking homes.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Parents appreciate the respect the school shows to their children and the increasing attention to academic skills.
- Students enjoy coming to school, where they feel safe and valued.
- Within the school there are good relations between adults and students which assist in the development of greater self-confidence and better behavior.
- The new principal is respected by students and has effected some necessary changes which have contributed to greater motivation on the part of many students.
- Assistant principals and coaches provide relevant professional development, assisting staff with the implementation of new approaches.
- Some outstanding work has been produced by students as the result of new project-based learning approaches.
- The preparation for employment is of a high quality and has been very successful for many students.
- Staff are totally committed to the development of independence in their students.
- There is an increasing amount of effective collaboration between teachers in planning and curriculum development.
- The school communicates well with parents and those who become involved in their children's academic work testify that they are able to see a wide range of assessment and project-based work.

Areas for improvement

- Develop better goal-setting on the part of teachers within the core curriculum.
- Broaden the curriculum with more art, music and some college experience.
- Improve teaching by ensuring that pace and targets move students on effectively.
- Provide appropriately challenging homework for higher performing students.
- Ensure that enough time is available for staff to consider individual student progress.
- Improve the gym area on the Houston Street site which currently restricts the physical education curriculum.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal has been the school leader for two-and-a-half years. She took over a school with many long-tenured and highly committed staff. Aply aided by her three assistant principals, she has sought to introduce project-based learning and develop challenging targets for all students. Staff are engaged in the project-based learning approach and many are very enthusiastic about the opportunities it presents to broaden student experiences and perspectives.

Links to outside employers, such as the Veterans' Hospital and the Labor Department are developing well and more students now move into supported employment by the age of 21 or earlier.

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 creates a very effective baseline of each student's performance as soon as they enter the school. It has a very clear picture of performance in each class and grade. The basis of this is the individualized education program, which is quickly supplemented with data from the Brigance Inventories. During the year this is regularly supplemented with data from behavior intervention plans, assessment of student projects and a range of teacher observations and informal classroom tests. All students are subject to alternative assessment.

Increasingly senior staff are using this data to look at the performance of different groups within the school. It has been particularly useful in looking at the performance of the 12:1:1 and 12:1:4 groups and has triggered professional support and development where low achievement is identified. There is a close and regular check made on students with attendance problems and those receiving speech and language support. In this way the administration can easily see if a particular service or procedure is working and adapt it if it is not. There is still some work to do before all sub-groups within the school are closely monitored, but the data is now available and the skills of analysis and interpretation are in place for many of them.

The Occupational Training Center is unique in Manhattan, but has counterparts in each of the other boroughs. Regular meetings of these principals and separate meetings of the coaches means that a good system of data sharing is developing, although it is not yet at the stage where student performance can be compared and conclusions reached concerning classroom and assessment practice.

The effectiveness of data collection is increasing with the development of software programs that will make collection and analysis quicker. The process is also aided by the

active involvement of the full range of services supporting, for instance, students with visual impairment, occupational therapy support and speech and language programs.

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 principal has introduced greater rigor into the identification of student performance and development of clear goals to move them on appropriately and promptly. This emphasis on high achievement and meaningful goals for individual students is now explicitly part of each teacher’s planning and recording. Parents and students identify the value they have gained from sharper targets and a more coherent development of work programs for individual students.

As all students have individualized education programs, the improved goal-setting and the quarterly reviews have an impact on everyone. There are many opportunities, both formal and informal, for staff to discuss patterns of individual progress. Staff meet with the pupil personnel committee, they discuss individuals with assistant principals and increasingly work together in grade groups to compare observations on students and share possible ways of supporting them. This is important because much of the teaching is carried out by individual specialist teachers and draws on information from paraprofessionals and other visiting specialists. A coherence of approach is essential.

To refine this process and to ensure even prompter and more detailed support of students who are at risk, the school is developing the role of ‘advisory teacher’. This will mean that every student will be one of a mixed group of between 8 and 10 students for whom a single member of staff has responsibility. This is already beginning to overcome the fragmentation arising from subject teaching and providing the basis for more detailed discussions with students and their parents. Parents themselves are pleased with the level of detail and the openness they encounter when they discuss their children’s performance with staff.

The quality of discussion within individual ‘case studies’ is high and, once again, well supplemented by a relevant range of related services information.

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.

Many staff have felt that there is a tension between the academic and vocational curriculum. This has been largely resolved as more and more teachers are seeing how well literacy skills in particular are developing with the introduction of the project-based curriculum. Overall, the curriculum is age-appropriate, especially with regard to those students in inclusion and work study settings. In addition staff, students and their families have seen a significant boost in self-confidence and a broadening of student’s knowledge base together with this development of good basic language skills. Many students feel that there should be more art, music and sports within the curriculum and would like

opportunities to experience college work. They also report that the present inappropriate gym space has a limiting effect on the physical education curriculum.

The success of the work studies element of the curriculum is very good. Student placements in hospitals, sales settings and public services are carefully monitored, with rigorous action taken if students do not maintain the highest standards. Success is easily measured. More students (36%) are going into work studies, compared with only 32% three years ago. In addition, fewer students moved into day center settings and more into supported employment. A small, but significant, number of students are now being offered open employment on the basis of their success in the work studies scheme.

Within the school, teaching is generally satisfactory, with some examples of very good instruction. The weakness in some lessons is lack of pace, together with insufficient use of data to group and plan. Students say that there is not a high enough expectation for higher performing students, shown in "easy" homework. However, the commitment of staff is exceptional and students progress well as a result. There is a high level of engagement in all lessons.

Attendance has a very high priority. Good daily and weekly procedures and close contact with homes has seen attendance rise from 78% to 85% over the past three years. Attendance for work studies has an equally high priority, with students being removed from a setting if they miss days or arrive late.

Budgeting, scheduling and staff appointments are well linked to the identified targets within the school. Thus, money has been spent on consultants to support teachers in their professional development as well as developing before and after school activities to support attendance. Schedules have been arranged so that prep times coincide and staff can work together and have common planning time. Staff would appreciate more time to undertake collaborative work. The development of teacher advisors has ensured that students have an adult who has a close personal interest in their progress and concerns.

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 is clear that respect for students is the first criterion for appointing new staff. In addition, she rightly identifies the willingness and ability to plan for individual students on the basis of assessment and other data as crucial. Raising the standard of professional competence is also the purpose of observations by the principal, senior staff visits to classrooms and the modeling of new ways of working. Formal feedback from these observations is of the highest order and this is supplemented by many informal discussions between staff that encourage reflection on practice and the sharing of good ideas.

Much effective professional development has been carried out with regard to setting sharper and more appropriate individualized education program goals. This has led to a significant rise in the quality of individual education plans throughout the school. Similar work is being undertaken with regard to in-class goal setting. There is more to be done here if the practice of every teacher is to match that of the best.

These changes have been possible because the principal has earned the respect of staff and students. She has shown a willingness to listen, but also a drive that has moved practice and student achievement along considerably. In particular, the introduction of project-based instruction is now well established and well received by the students themselves. She has linked the five sites well, and ensured that all staff are kept informed and trained. She has ensured that the school runs smoothly and senior staff model good practices for students and staff alike.

To support the curriculum, and particularly the work-related element, the school has developed many effective partnerships. The range of potential employers is increasing, largely thanks to the excellent work of the transition coordinator and job developer. Wherever there is a student need the school has put in place external supports. Thus, the small Chinese population within the school derives benefit from the Chinese American Planning Council, placements have developed well with McDonald's and the New York Public Library and additional counseling support is available from a range of community organizations.

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 school has a well developed Comprehensive Education Plan. It has suffered this year from the external requirement that it be a narrative rather than an action plan document. However, it is well integrated by the school leadership team, with representation from all staff and parents. The plan provides a wide range of targets to be met and there is a regular review to ensure that each staff member is on target.

Senior staff have used the wide range of data to identify, for example, where professional development is needed, where staff require resources to develop the theme of 'mystery' in their writing work and after school sessions for core skill development.

The school has been given three criteria against which it is to be assessed: improved attendance and maintaining grade 3 and 4 levels within English language arts and mathematics. Clearly documented success in these three areas indicates that the strong emphasis on linking everything to improving student outcomes has been successful.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Manhattan Occupational Training Center (PS 721M)	∅	✓	+
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	