



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Intermediate School 204

**36- 41 28th Street
Queens
NY 11106**

Principal: Thomas Semanski

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Reviewer: Richard Woolf

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Oliver Wendell Holmes Intermediate School serves approximately 954 students in grades 6 through 8. The school has been open 50 years with the current administration being in place for the last four years.

The student population of the school is made up of 49% Hispanic, 23% Black, 22% Asian 22%, and 6% White. There are approximately the same number of males and females. The number of English language learners is approximately 10% and special education students make up 9% of the school population and for both groups this is comparable to similar schools but higher than City schools. Student attendance consistently runs at over 92% which is higher than both similar and City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 85% of the students and this is comparable with similar schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and administration are dedicated educators who are building capacity to move the school forward.
- There is a proficient and increasing use of data to inform instruction
- The splitting of the school into three academies assists staff and students to know and respect each other.
- Parents are fully supportive of the school in raising the achievement levels of their children and in creating a safe environment.
- The school has excellent links to external organizations which is impacting positively on learning.
- The staff show high levels of commitment in their work.
- The display in hallways and classrooms of student work is exemplary.
- The use of computer aided software to analyze data is an exciting and welcomed initiative.

What the school needs to improve

- Set more challenging targets to raise the achievements of all students, particularly those performing below grade level.
- Further develop the use of differentiation in instruction to improve overall achievement at every grade level.
- Develop ways of making the goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan more challenging in both the long and short term.
- Explore how professional development can become more focused on raising teacher expectations.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal, who is an experienced educator, is in his fourth year as leader of the Oliver Wendell Holmes Intermediate School and provides strong leadership which is valued by staff, parents and students. He is determined that the school will deliver an academic program which enhances the opportunities of all the students in his care.

The improvements seen over the last four years are appreciated and valued by the entire school community. This is noticeable in the development of the academy structure which is helping to facilitate learning in smaller communities. The drive to improve literacy levels across the whole school is having positive results. Through effective use of data, the staff are being challenged to rethink their approach to differentiation. This approach is fully endorsed by senior colleagues who are acting as change agents alongside the principal. The principal recognizes he has to take a more strategic overview of the school's future and in doing so set more challenging goals. However, data is starting to provide classroom teachers with the information they need to help them raise academic achievement.

Parents are increasingly aware of the efforts being made by the staff to raise their children's expectations. The school has very good links with supportive community based organizations and this is beginning to impact upon the school.

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 uses all data from State and City tests as a basis to plan teaching groups and to identify students in need of extra support and guidance. However, the school has also been developing a range of complementary data over the past four years. This year more detailed data is being generated in house to inform instruction and to take into account performance of its ethnic groups, English language learners and special education students. This data includes tracking systems as well as a pilot computer program which provides teachers with disaggregated data more systematically. These are being driven by the administration to effect change on instruction and to respond to students' individual or group needs.

Each member of staff has an assessment notebook for recording their students' achievements which is proving an invaluable tool to inform instruction. The overall effect of these changes is impacting positively upon student learning. For those students displaying particular needs, a system of additional support has been established through the use of specialist teachers as well as outside school agencies. Identification of higher achieving students is made from the data to form honors groups in each grade level. As a

result of the increased use of data, the principal believes that his teachers can discuss more authoritatively with parents about their children's progress.

There has been an increase in academic results during the last academic year, compared to both similar schools and other City schools. However, the principal and his staff believe the increased use of data is providing further improvements in academic achievement. The school uses data rigorously to compare itself to the previous performances of individual students and grade levels.

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 uses the Comprehensive Education Plan as tool to further academic instruction. Over the last four years, more planning of a detailed nature has been undertaken. Three assistant principals are each responsible for an academy within the school and the fourth has oversight of all instruction across the entire school. The targets are conveyed to academy members and revisited at intervals during common preparation time and professional development sessions. The school does not yet set teachers' individual targets from these overall plans in order to impact upon future instruction.

A key planning feature is the development of literacy across the curriculum. There is an expectation, through this program, that English language learners and special education students will participate in instruction that has the same rigor as general education students. While teachers meet regularly to discuss issues relating to performance, there is not sufficient emphasis placed on the needs of the large numbers of students performing below grade level. The school is giving further consideration on how to support the progress of this group, across the school, as well as in individual classrooms.

The work of the lead professionals in setting high expectations and in supporting both teachers and students, and the impact this is having on instruction, is greatly appreciated at a professional and personal level by staff. Some students are aware of their individual progress and speak positively about what is expected of them. However, some would like more help in knowing how to progress to the next and higher levels as a way of adopting more individually challenging goals.

Parents are encouraged to be partners in their child's learning. There is an active parent group and they are very supportive of the efforts the school is making with respect to improving their children's education. Likewise, the development of a school website and the issuing of family laptops to engage in the education process are beginning to have an affect on parent and student motivation.

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 aligns its educational programs, with all aspects of the mandatory curriculum, making adjustments when necessary. For example, the analysis of data suggested that the literacy content in mathematics was too advanced for many of the students and therefore adjustments were made by teachers in order for students to access the mathematics program.

Whilst teachers are held accountable for their instruction there is not sufficient rigor applied to demonstrate how this is aimed at improving individual or whole school outcomes. There is evidence of differentiation taking place in some classrooms. The school does not yet analyze its effectiveness or how it is impacting upon individual or grade level learning.

The principal uses his budget to good affect. Extra time and resources allocated to identify classes most in need are a good example of this. The appointment of a fourth assistant principal to oversee instruction and lead the work of the coaches is helping to enhance instruction. Scheduling of classes after school and on Saturday morning for the lowest achieving students is slowly beginning to show results. The students are aware of the need to try hard and be successful and evidence shows they are actively engaged in their lessons. They have a great deal of respect for their teachers and principal and there is always an adult prepared to help them to improve their learning and self-esteem.

The data suggests the school’s attendance policy is producing rates on a par to similar schools. This increase in attendance is providing an opportunity for more students to become engaged in the learning process. The school has set itself an ambitious goal for the coming year. Parents are appreciative of the efforts being made to raise attendance and the procedures in place to affect this.

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’s staff selection policy is very clear in that new staff must be personable, knowledgeable, have the ability to utilize data and be student centered. He is building a team who appreciates and understands that their students can succeed in life by being given a positive and encouraging atmosphere in which to learn. Teachers accept that his management style allows them professional freedom to instruct in a manner appropriate to the needs of their students. This has the effect of making the staff feel trusted and valued. There are good opportunities for professional development both within the school and outside. This is based upon student data revealing both individual and whole school issues. However, the school does not yet implement professional development to raise individual teacher expectations. Staff uses inter-visitations to help with instruction but as yet the school does not have a planned program. The nature of the academy structure allows for teams to meet regularly to assess previous instructional methods and plan for future.

The principal sets high standards and demonstrates these to the whole school community on a daily basis. He is respected for being approachable, is a constant presence in the school and has demonstrated the capacity to effect change. He and his assistant principals conduct formal and informal classroom observations through which detailed knowledge of the staff is obtained. The school is well managed and organized, which encourages learning and is key to how the school has demonstrated progress over the last four years.

The principal realizes the vital role parents play in working in partnership with the school and is active in promoting their involvement. The parent body has responded very favorably to the administration. In addition to a very active parent teacher association the school has excellent links with outside organizations. The most prominent is the Beacon program which provides for the school to remain open until 10:00 pm six evenings a week. The program offers adult classes, such as English as a second language, which has high enrollment. Another program liked by the students is tennis coaching and other sports programs offered by outside community based organizations that are impacting upon learning. Similarly, these partnerships which encourage students to broaden their horizons and look to entering college are well respected.

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.

Monitoring takes place at a number of levels during the school year, although the current system is not sufficiently rigorous. The school does not yet undertake an analysis in depth of collective and individual student data to demonstrate that across all grade levels sufficient progress is being made. At present there is not enough information available to set new and more challenging short-term and long-term goals.

The principal has a clear vision of how goals should be set and the measures necessary to demonstrate success in achieving them. However, his understanding of the way effective monitoring takes place is not yet sufficiently disseminated throughout the whole school. Checks against the Comprehensive Education Plan are undertaken during the year and any variances are addressed accordingly by the revision of individual student, class or grade level goals to show progress towards overall targets. There is evidence to show monitoring among the various grade level teams plays an important part in highlighting individual concerns. However, this does not pay sufficient attention to the overall picture of what is needed to move the whole school forward. This will be of particular importance when the school reassesses its goals for next year as a result of the work being undertaken in the academies.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Intermediate School is a school which cares for its students and is creating rich learning experiences for them. It is well positioned to undertake the next phase of its development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Oliver Wendell Holmes (IS 204)	∅	✓	+
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	