



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Oliver Wendell Holmes School**

**Intermediate School 204**

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

**Principal: Yvonne Leimsider**

**Dates of review: June 2 - 3, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Donna Dimino**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Oliver Wendell Holmes School is an intermediate school with 870 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 22% Black, 54% Hispanic, 6% White, and 19% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 80% eligibility.

The principal was an assistant principal at the school and took over following the premature death of the last principal in September 2007.

The school became an empowerment school in June 2007.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal is respected as an effective leader, is visible around the school, accessible and very supportive of staff and students.
- School leaders and key members of staff effectively gather data to plan long-term goals for improving student outcomes in identified focus areas.
- The school makes strategic decisions to provide appropriate services for those students in greatest need of improvement.
- Teachers are dedicated professionals who support each other's initiatives and value collaboration.
- Well-established rules, regulations and procedures contribute to an orderly and well-run learning organization.
- Adults know and care for students very well resulting in an emotionally safe environment.
- Good analysis of performance data of special education students and English language learners has led to the school providing effective support for these students.
- Effective strategic decisions with regard to budgeting and scheduling has led to improved student performance.

### What the school needs to improve

- Articulate the vision for the school, including whole school goals, simply and communicate it to all stakeholders so that it becomes a driving force for school improvement.
- Develop formal action plans for all initiatives with short-term benchmarks to determine incremental gains.
- Ensure that all teachers develop skills to collect, analyze and use a full range of information about students and their learning to revise plans effectively.
- Ensure that data informs planning for meeting the needs of all students including high achievers and other sub-groups through differentiated activities and questioning.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

### **Overall Evaluation**

#### **This school is proficient.**

During the past year, a significant change has happened at the school after making the decision to become an empowerment school in June 2007. The new principal and staff have been working hard despite the grief many are experiencing following the untimely death of the last principal. The principal and cabinet have carried on the work that the last principal and current leadership team laid out together. While always a cohesive team, it has taken time for the new cabinet to begin formulating a more current vision with their imprint for long- and short-term goals.

Since the last Quality Review the school is planning professional development based on what data reveals about staff and student needs. Professional development has become more meaningful resulting in more collaborative discussions and planning based on data. The school surveys teachers for their input on future training offerings. The school programs well-attended common preparation periods and schedules inter-visitations based on differentiated needs of staff as the result of informal walkthroughs by supervisors. The school has made strategic decisions in staffing, programming and curriculum to raise the achievement of low performing students in English language arts. By reducing teacher to student ratios for in-class instruction, redesigning how teachers' professional administrative periods are used, and expanding the use of specific intervention programs, Level 1 and Level 2 students are making gains in English language arts. Differentiated instruction is not consistent in all classrooms.

The work of the inquiry team exemplifies the school's increasing awareness of how data is collected and analyzed to inform differentiated goal-setting. The team has made use of ARIS along with other assessment tools to highlight a subgroup of grade 7 students struggling in reading and whose sub-skill deficiency is inference. An intervention program has been designed to include the Read 180 lab along with explicit instruction in vocabulary. A comprehensive action plan including benchmarks for tracking progress has been guiding the work.

### **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 the student's progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Teachers collect data as a matter of routine in every classroom, recording it in binders. They use gross data from standardized assessments and interim data to give them a

picture of each student's performance. Students identified for the Read 180 lab have more complete assessment profiles with formative data on specific reading skills. Other reading assessments are administered to all students twice a year to provide baseline and summative skills data in English language arts proficiency. In mathematics, unit tests are the primary source of assessment data with some teachers gathering more formative data from conference notes.

The school makes useful comparisons with its previous data as well as with similar middle schools. Monitoring of special education students and English language learners has taken place. Reducing teacher to student ratios, implementing specific interventions and making strategic staffing decisions are the direct result of what data has revealed about the achievement of these populations of students. Although all teachers have administrative laptops for accessing data, the data itself is not organized into friendly, at-a-glance systems to better deduce trends and patterns leading to immediate revisions on an individualized basis.

Black males are gaining recognition as a subgroup in need of attention in English language arts. The school has responded with the purchasing of more culturally sensitive literature. The school has no formal systems to compare relative student performance by ethnicity or gender. Despite this, the school has identified Black males as a subgroup needing additional English language arts support.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Teachers have become comfortable with the collection of data. While most staff use data as the basis for professional discourse to set goals for groups of students, there is an inconsistent approach to how well data is used to set goals for individual students. The work of the inquiry team is serving successfully to exemplify the difference that can be made when focused attention is given to students in greatest need. A well designed action plan outlining purposeful use of designated staff, programs, assessment tools and instructional strategies based on discreet skill deficits is yielding promising results with students in the bottom third of proficiency in English language arts.

Leadership is building a culture of a professional learning community whereby all stakeholders have input in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. The principal has high expectations for the students in her charge. Students say they know the principal expects them to go to college by the way she speaks with them. Parents concur and have the highest regard for the principal as a hands-on leader who maintains a safe, nurturing environment for their children. The school is effective in keeping parents informed of their child's progress. Parents receive quarterly progress reports in addition to quarterly report cards informing them of their children's progress. Some teachers correspond with parents via email from a school blog. The school posts the newsletter on the school's website. The school does not have a formal student handbook, and thus is not able to share whole school goals with all stakeholders.

One significant way the school lets students in on the expectations of specific lessons is through the use of rubrics throughout the building. Students routinely know how to succeed in individual tasks and say the school expects them to achieve their best and move on through high school to college. The school reinforces this further by the names

of the three academies: Harvard, Yale and Princeton. Recently, the entire school community held a career day to expose students to vocational options.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school adheres to a solid core curriculum that is well aligned to the needs of the students. As an empowerment school, the decision was made to use a commercial math curriculum which the school feels provides a better pacing calendar aligned with the March standardized assessment. It is too early to determine the impact on students’ gains. There are various extracurricular offerings before and after school geared to better serve the needs of the school’s youth. Two noteworthy examples are the intramural sports program and the specialized high school preparation course.

Teachers embrace the opportunity to collaborate during common preparation periods to plan units of study based upon data. Coaches and lead teachers provide additional support. There are differences in the ways that teachers use the information they have about students to adapt their teaching to match learning styles and think creatively about how to engage students in motivating and interesting tasks. Students state that lessons are sometimes boring, and often the teacher does all the talking. Hence, in some classrooms, lessons lack rigor, and teachers’ expectations of students are generic in nature leading to a watered down version of differentiated instruction.

While it is clear that staff are expected to increase learning outcomes for students, the lack of a discreet action plan with defined roles and timelines does not make it easy to hold staff accountable. The principal and cabinet are aware of this if data is to be translated into more rigorous and engaging lessons based on individual student needs consistently across the school.

A positive aspect of leadership is the effective way they utilize budget, staffing and scheduling resources to drive the increase of student outcomes. The split classes creating smaller class size with students in greatest need of improvement is a prime example.

The environment across the school is one of trust, particularly between students and adults. An extrinsic reinforcement system named “Caught Bee-ing Good” works well with most students. There are good procedures in place to ensure that absence and lateness are monitored, and the school’s follow up is timely.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

School leaders are well aware of where instructional strengths are as well as areas for development in practice lie. They match professional development to help address these areas through their school support organization and from their own expertise. The school is determined to build capacity from within. The school strategically deploys a

combination of school-based coaches, lead teachers in English language arts and mathematics, retired personnel and outside consultants to support teachers' professional growth and provide differentiated services to those students in greatest need. Leaders rely on regular, focused classroom walkthroughs as well as formal observations to set effective goals for teachers. Formalized inter-visitations are a common practice in developing expertise and are particularly used for staff in danger of an unsatisfactory rating. Once a month school leaders conduct a collegial walk of the school to develop their own common understanding of the implementation of all initiatives. While decisions in planning for professional offerings are strategic, this new cabinet has yet to create an explicit overall plan for the content of professional development through the year. New teachers are supported effectively by the school-based mentors and lead teachers as well as by other colleagues and school leaders in more informal ways. There is no staff handbook at this point in time.

Procedures are clear, and stakeholders have a good understanding of key processes. The principal organizes the school well so it operates smoothly. The reward system is well applied for the most part and valued by a majority of students. The school has not yet taken full responsibility for those students of high behavioral need by seeking more rigorous and creative applications of the system. Staff seem more accustomed to dealing with compliant students and believe that more parent involvement is the best solution to dealing with the most challenging students, rather than taking responsibility at the classroom level. The principal is aware of the value of partnerships with external agencies and is actively grooming additional relationships to support the school's goals.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The Comprehensive Education Plan provides the basis for evaluating progress. The principal and assistant principals place a strong emphasis on the need to develop skills for the effective collection and analysis of data which is supported with the employment of the latest technology. This works particularly well at the administrative level and with key members of the staff, particularly in improving outcomes for students in greatest need of improvement. Clear hypotheses are derived from both hard data, such as standardized test results, and soft data from periodic assessments, program assessments and observations. This then is linked closely with the appropriate development of differentiated interventions and learning structures for these students. The cabinet reviews progress as a matter of routine amongst themselves and in other collaborative meetings including those with student support staff in order to determine changes to interventions. At the class level, teachers speak to a commitment to translating data to informed instructional practice; however there are inconsistencies in how well they use typical as well as low inference data to better inform differentiated instruction for individual students and at varying levels of challenge. The school has yet to develop an explicit and uniform system for monitoring and supporting the practice of all teachers in tracking students' incremental gains.

The principal and assistant principals have been working steadfastly to carry on the good work of the previous principal in response to their grief. They have gained the ability to redefine themselves as a leadership team. In so doing, they are building their own vision for the school as they focus on expanding the good educational habits and procedures that were begun in order to make even more improvements for their students.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Oliver Wendell Holmes School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?		X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?		X			
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?		X			
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X			
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?			X		
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?			X		
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

To what extent does the school ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?			X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?			X		
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?			X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?			X		
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>