

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Manhattan Theatre Lab High School

High School 283

**122 Amsterdam Avenue
New York
NY 10023**

Principal: Evelyn Collins

Dates of review: May 11 – 12, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Jeffrey Soloff

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Manhattan Theatre Lab High School is a high school with 334 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 55% Black, 43% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 4% special education students. Boys account for 38% of the students enrolled and girls account for 62%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 78.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 65% eligibility. The school is located in the basement of a building it shares with five other high schools.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Manhattan Theatre Lab High School is a small, non-audition performing arts high school that attracts students from all five boroughs. As freshmen, students experience ten week cycles of tap dance, stage design, acting and chorus. They then select performing arts majors for the following years.

Under the leadership of a dynamic principal, the school has made great strides in the last two years. Students feel that the school community is a family and care about one another. Caring teachers establish close relationships with students. The principal, through the establishment of a daily common planning period, fostered a culture that is collaborative and academically focused. Students realize that in order to take advantage of the performing arts program, they have to attend school and succeed in their schoolwork. Professional development this year included workshops on differentiating instruction. However, teachers are not focusing enough on the use of differentiated activities to meet the needs of all students. Administrators conduct frequent lesson observations, which are positive learning experiences. At present, only one teacher and two assistant principals serve on the inquiry team, which is studying low-achieving tenth grade English language arts students.

Effective partnerships with outside organizations and performing arts groups expand the curriculum to provide additional opportunities for the students. This exposure broadens students' chances to receive support services and artistic opportunities while helping their social well being.

Data analysis has become an important part of the school's culture. Administrators and teachers review data constantly and make changes in teacher goals and instructional methods. Data-based organizational decisions support improvements in learning. Interim checkpoints and timeframes are not yet consistently in place. Learning goals, written by most students, are general in nature.

The principal's focus on improved discipline and a more rigorous curriculum, combined with an excellent performing arts program has greatly improved the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's positive leadership has created a culture focused on student achievement and teacher collaboration, which supports professional growth.
- Through regular use of a wide range of relevant data, leaders and faculty have an ongoing understanding of individual, subgroup and subject performance, which informs instruction and organizational decisions.
- The school provides daily opportunities for teachers to collaborate, examine data, and share ideas to improve student outcomes.
- The school has a sound understanding of its strengths and areas for development, a commitment to future growth and a clear vision, which it effectively communicates to students, staff and family.
- Leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions to ensure that the staff has all the resources necessary to support improvements in learning.
- The school has developed effective partnerships with community-based organizations, colleges and performing arts groups to provide programs, resources and support for students.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop teachers' capacity to provide differentiated instruction geared to match all students' identified learning needs.
- Establish precise learning goals for each student in all core subjects and develop challenging and engaging learning opportunities.
- Improve the use of data in the school-wide goal-setting process to include measurable interim checkpoints and suitable timeframes toward meeting end-of-year targets.
- Broaden the work of the inquiry team so that the school participates in the process of analyzing student learning outcomes and increasing the rate of student achievement.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses a wide range of data to effectively monitor student performance. Through daily collaborative planning time, teachers discuss student progress in both department and grade level meetings. Teachers share strategies and discuss alternative scheduling, such as block scheduling, at these meetings. In addition, they examine Regents results using item analysis and identify trends and potential areas for improvement for departments and groups of students. The school targeted the lowest-performing tenth graders, as measured by their eighth grade English language arts test, as an area of concern as well as the overall achievement of Black males. Data is not analyzed for all core subjects. Both formal and informal interim assessments contribute to teachers' understanding of student needs and future planning. The Learning Support Organization uses the school's data to prepare a data tracker that informs staff about students who are on track to graduate and which students need additional support. Based on this data, teachers make changes in their instructional strategies and the school determines which students require extra help services. The guidance department supports those students who have low expectations of themselves due to past failures, as well as students with test anxiety.

The introduction of the phone messenger system increased attendance from 78% to 81% this year. School personnel diligently contact parents about attendance and lateness in an effort to maximize instructional time for students. Poor attendance disqualifies students from their performing arts productions.

Parents receive progress reports midway through each of the six marking periods so that they have an ongoing awareness of their child's progress. Some teachers use the e-chalk website to post work and make grades available for families. The school encourages parents to call teachers to learn more about the progress of their child. Concrete next steps for parents and students to assess data are not in evidence. The Parent Coordinator works hard to increase the limited parental involvement in the school.

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.

School goals, established at a retreat, drive the instructional program. Grade level and departmental meetings serve as the springboard for setting measurable learning goals for students in English language arts, math, social studies, science and the performing

arts. Although most students have goals, they are not precise and content-based goals. Some teachers communicate learning goals to parents; however, this practice is not consistent throughout the school. As a result, only some parents know their child's goals.

After each marking period, the principal reviews scholarship data and meets with teachers to discuss their results and make appropriate recommendations for improvement in student learning. The assistant principals, at grade level and department meetings, discuss results with the teachers.

The frequency of collaboration, which includes sharing of data, helps teachers to develop strategies and programs that meet the learning needs of all students. Administrators and teachers make good use of ARIS to pinpoint student deficits and create new intervention strategies. The administration and teachers communicate high academic, behavioral and attendance expectations to students throughout the year. A bulletin board display shows the daily attendance as well as a chart with each month's attendance. Free movie passes for perfect monthly attendance serve as a motivation for students.

The school's leadership team, which consists of teachers, administrators, parents and students, creates the Comprehensive Educational Plan, which is a meaningful tool that informs all members of the school community about the goals of the school. The plan raises the bar for academic expectations, discipline and attendance. The Comprehensive Education Plan, reviewed at monthly leadership team meetings, leads to modifications if needed. The curriculum does not challenge the higher performing students.

Parent workshops, conducted during the year, provide the opportunity to learn more about the school, its programs and opportunities for children. Parents are very pleased with the improvements that the principal has made in the last few years. One parent stated that the principal "has turned chaos into calmness."

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school offers a traditional academic program as well as a performing arts curriculum. Ninth graders experience ten weeks of dance, drama, choral music and stage design as a prelude to selecting an arts major for the rest of their high school program at Manhattan Theatre Lab High School. Students, motivated by the arts program, understand that they have to succeed academically as well. The current principal stresses academics first, which is a departure from previous principals. In an effort to help teachers deliver challenging and appropriate instruction, experts from the Learning Support Organization provide professional development in different areas. School leaders ensure curriculum alignment in all subjects. The principal makes teachers responsible for providing challenging and appropriate instruction, as well as accountable for student outcomes.

The absence of differentiated instruction limits the individualization of instruction for each student. Despite professional development opportunities in differentiation, few teachers utilize this practice in their instructional programs. Teachers give unit assessments and other tests but fail to utilize this data to formally differentiate instruction. The lack of differentiation inhibits students' chances of reaching their learning goals.

Teachers collaborate and plan together through the daily common planning period. This collegiality effectively promotes discussion among department and grade-level teachers about learning outcomes and instructional strategies.

The administration works hard to provide the resources and support needed by teachers. All teachers now have computers in their rooms. The first SMART Board just arrived. The upgrading of technology motivates students and enhances the instructional program. The budget process begins with an analysis about what worked and what didn't this year. Discussions with the school leadership team and cabinet, coupled with analysis of data, leads to the creation of the new budget. In response to student need, an extra-help ninth period was created this year, as well as a tenth period for credit recovery. These programs, instituted to help raise the Regents passing rate and facilitate graduation, raised the graduation rate from 50% to 75%. Resources have not been allocated to make the curriculum more rigorous.

The students enjoy coming to school and being part of a "family" atmosphere where "teachers and students care for each other." The faculty enjoys a sense of trust and respect for each other that had not existed in the past.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Administrators have a thorough understanding of teachers' strengths and weaknesses through frequent formal and informal observations. The administrators observe teacher practice, student engagement and the culture of the classroom in order to paint an accurate picture of the learning environment. The principal has asked teachers to connect their lessons to students' everyday lives in order to improve student engagement. Post-observation discussions include a review of the achievement of the teacher's goals, methods employed and classroom management. Discussions about data are not part of the post-observation conferences.

Although teacher collaboration is pervasive throughout the school and occurs on a daily basis, participation in the inquiry process is limited to one teacher and two assistant principals. Having one teacher and two assistant principals on the team minimizes teacher participation, as well as the number of students whose learning needs, interests and styles can be deeply examined so that teachers can deliver effective instruction is. Limited sharing of inquiry works limits the effect of the team's work. At collaborative grade level and department meetings, teachers actively discuss their practice, data and schedule intervisitations aimed at improving instruction. The principal publishes a monthly professional development calendar indicating the topics, such as unit planning in English, diagnostic assessments in social studies and motivational strategies in math, that he has scheduled.

Partnerships with community-based and arts organizations enhance the academic, creative and emotional growth of students. These partnerships include Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Theatre Development Fund, New York City Ballet, College for Every Student, Barnard College Liberty Program and St. Luke's Hospital counseling program. Guidance works hard to encourage all students to graduate and attend college even if they intend to pursue a career in the performing arts. The principal's constant presence in the halls and zero tolerance policy vastly improved discipline. According to a student, "Kids no longer run the school." The relationship between the principal, teachers and students leads to a calmer school with fewer negative student interactions. The school's infrequent interactions with many parents limit parental involvement in their children's education.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

School leaders and faculty meet regularly during common planning periods to review and discuss the progress of students in all subjects. Teachers have data binders that they use to track and monitor student progress. Scholarship reports, formative assessment results and teacher observation data help them to analyze student learning outcomes and assess achievement. These meetings enable the staff to assess their strengths, as well as areas for growth, in order to continue the effort to raise student achievement levels. The principal stated, "The Comprehensive Educational Plan is always in our consciousness." Despite frequent conversations about data, teachers have not uniformly established interim checkpoints and timeframes for meeting their goals.

The administration reviews the progress report, Quality Review and learning environment survey and shares them with the school leadership team in order to make informed judgments about organizational decisions. Attendance is improving, the school is safe and strategies are in place to improve the delivery of instruction. Frequent classroom observations keep the administration informed about the effectiveness of teachers and their practice, as well as student engagement.

The school's use of the phone messenger system provides daily communication with parents about absence, lateness and school events. The administration encourages parents to participate in the Comprehensive Educational Plan and school leadership team.

The principal's vision is "to provide a learning community where academic rigor and creative expression go hand in hand." Due to the hard work of the principal, the Manhattan Theatre Lab High School is proud of their academic improvement, artistic program and reputation in the community. One parent stated, "The principal is caring, hard working, accessible and tough when she has to be." Parents, because of their limited involvement are not fully aware of the school's vision.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Manhattan Theatre Lab High School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?		X		
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

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

<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X		
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed