THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF JOHN DEWEY HIGH SCHOOL

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In the twenty-five years since its founding, John Dewey High School has been a showcase for a progressive philosophy of education. As such, it has attracted the attention of educators from around the world, many of whom have visited Dewey throughout the years and have incorporated Dewey principles into their home school systems. Dewey has also been a model from which other New York City high schools (Murrow and Hillcrest) have been formed. Many progressive educational ideas which were first tried and tested at Dewey are presently being used as standard principles in the development of new schools throughout the municipal area and the nation.

John Dewey believed that learning MUST be centered around the needs and positive interests of the child in the context of an innovative, democratic and highly social environment. The following features of the Dewey program form a structure which facilitates the accomplishment of that goal.

1. **A Cyclical Pattern of Organization:** The Dewey year is divided into four nine-week cycles (mini-terms) which provide flexibility in programming and opportunities for students to take a greater variety of courses and to interact frequently with new classmates and teachers.

2. **Flexible Modular Scheduling:** The eight hour day is divided into twenty-two twenty minute time periods called mods (organized into ten larger units called bands) which allow for a high degree of programming flexibility.

3. **A Non-numerical Grading System:** The Dewey grading system de-emphasizes competition for grades and the fear of failing and emphasizes Mastery Learning, that is; learning for the sake of learning. Student progress is reported in terms of **ME** (mastery with excellence), **M** (mastery), **MC** (mastery with condition, indicating specific areas of weakness), **R** (retention) and **MI** (mastery in an independent study program). An important element of this system is that students are able to learn at their own rates.

4. **A Resource Center System:** Each department is equipped with a mini-center with books, pamphlets, periodicals, special class materials , audio-visual aids, etc. Students come to these centers to study, read, work on homeworks, special class assignments and enrichment projects, to review tests, to do research and to receive individual help from teachers who are available to offer assistance. Individual departments offer special presentations, demonstrations and/or activities in these facilities.

5. **An Independent Study Program in an Extended School Day:** Approximately two hours of a student's daily schedule are set aside for independent study. Dewey students are encouraged to take responsibility for deciding how to make productive use of this time. They can avail themselves of resource center services, the school library and DISK opportunities (described below). They can participate in the activities of numerous clubs and institutes which focus on career interests, various student publications and student organizations, community service initiatives, academically and socially related group activities (ISGA) or intramural sports programs. Within the framework of an eight-hour school day, these opportunities foster deeper, more productive and more personal ties among Dewey students and between Dewey students and their teachers.

6. **A DISK (Dewey Independent Study Kit) Program:** DISKs are self-contained courses of study taken as independent study under the supervision and guidance of departmental DISK Coordinators. Students obtain course credit by completing the assigned work and passing examinations. If there is a subject area in which a student wishes to pursue study but for which a DISK program is unavailable, the student can create a DISK in collaboration with the DISK Coordinator. Dewey students have found the DISK program invaluable as a vehicle for pursuing advanced study as well as for remedying past deficiencies. It is also an ideal tool for developing college-level study skills.

7. **Independent Study in the Community:** Dewey students can choose to explore a career interest and/or perform a community service by doing volunteer work in the community. This can be accomplished through a variety of programs, courses and clubs such as 4 and 1, Executive Internship, special education work-study programs, special music and dance programs, the art and home economics courses, the marine biology and horticulture classes, the Academy of Finance, the Key Club and many others.

8. **Heterogeneity in the Classroom and School Community:** Dewey is a multicultural school par excellence, boasting a representative student population from virtually every New York City ethnic group. It is the founding school and headquarters of the Council for Unity, the award winning organization whose mission to promote inter-ethnic harmony and understanding has been expanded to scores of schools in the New York City system and to other districts nationwide. Dewey takes pride in the fact that its students feel little need to separate themselves into racial/ethnic groups. Dewey's aim is to create a larger community (in both the classroom and the school environment) as a dynamic, interactive mixture of all races, religions, cultures, grade levels and learning abilities, from which understanding and appreciation are developed and differences in others are celebrated. One feature of this system is that Dewey's classes are a mixture of older and younger students in the same room, a practice which has proven successful in encouraging mature behavior and improved concentration on the part of the younger students and a sense of responsibility as role models on the part of the older.

9. **A Rich Social Environment:** In keeping with the Dewey philosophy that "education is life and not merely a preparation for life," John Dewey High School provides a social environment rich in courses, special programs, clubs and numerous extra-curricular activities geared to developing the social and emotional growth of students to the fullest.
These include student government, Council for Unity, Peer Mediation, leadership classes, ISGA, school-wide festivals, community activities, class trips, ninety active clubs and an "L" band (a one-hour period per week set aside for social and extra-curricular activities).

10. **Student Decision Making and Freedom of Choice Set In an Atmosphere of Innovation and Dynamic Interchange:** Dewey students are encouraged to think for themselves, to be creative and self-sufficient, to manage their own course selections, to organize their independent study time, to interact with peers and teachers frequently, and to be responsible citizens of a democratic society. Each cycle, students choose from an extensive variety of standard and elective courses and innovative programs the ones they wish to pursue in order to fulfill graduation requirements or to follow their own interests. As a result of the Dewey method of empowering students to take charge of their own academic and social lives (with the guidance and support of the staff), Dewey education, in comparison to education offered in traditional New York City high schools, is broader, more open, more flexible, more personalized, character building in nature and freedom loving. At graduation, Dewey students are characteristically more capable of going on to higher education (as will be shown by the statistics presented in this school profile), of making career choices, of becoming successful in those careers and of finding a fulfilling place for themselves in society.

11. **An Eight Hour School Day (Extended Day):** A cornerstone of the Dewey program since 1969, the extended schedule of Dewey students and staff affords the time necessary to maintain and enhance the school's multi-faceted academic and co-curricular activities and to promote the achievements of which the Dewey community feels justly proud.

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