

Pre-kindergarten | Elementary | Middle school | **High school** | District 75

## H.S. 540 John Dewey High School

50 Avenue X BROOKLYN, NY 11223

Phone: (718) 373-6400 | Fax: (718) 266-4385 Principal: Mr. Barry Fried

Parent Coordinator: Kristine Gattuso (347) 563-4602

### At a Glance

**Grade levels:** 9 to 12

**Class size:** 28-34

**Enrollment:** 3262

**Ethnicity %:** 20 W 31 B 19 H 32 A

**Attendance:** 84%

**Graduation rate:** 49.8%

**7-year graduation rate:** 84.5%

**College admissions:** good

### District 21

**HS Supt:** Dov Rokeach

**SSO:** LSO: Community

**Network Leader:** Hal Epstein

**Neighborhood:**

Gravesend/Bensonhurst

**Admissions:** Priority to District 21 residents/ed opt

### More info

[After school directory](#)

### Our Review

**What's special:** Self-directed students can take advantage of varied, challenging academic programs.

**Downside:** No sports teams; less focused students may not do well with the autonomy.

Established in 1969 as a beacon of progressive education, John Dewey High School remains true to its core belief that motivated students should have the flexibility to direct their own education. Dewey offers its students a course catalog that rivals many small colleges and that places a strong focus on writing and communication. For most students, programs shift every nine weeks; there are four "cycles" in an academic year, with new teachers and classes for every cycle. Juniors take two cycles of Regents exam prep in the first semester of the year.

While this flexible model offers motivated, self-directed students autonomy, those who are less focused, or who have been in more structured schools, can struggle. The school offers two orientation sessions to help 9th graders adapt. (Dewey admits about 900 9th-graders each year). It also offers a range of independent study options for students who wish to take extra credits or make up missing work. Independent study options vary in their rigor; all are supervised by faculty members. Dewey also has a small "Success Academy" to support at-risk 10th graders in a more structured classroom environment. The school offers Advanced Placement courses in computer science, calculus, and a range of sciences and social science.

Dewey is a large school, and the school day is long, stretched over many "bands," or class periods. Class schedules change from day to day, again on the college model, with some classes meeting three or four times weekly. Despite more than 3,200 students in a building built for 2,800, hallways are fairly calm when students switch classes. For students looking for smaller, more focused environments, the school's Computer Science Institute, Virtual Enterprise program, or Culinary Arts Program offer less populous alternatives.

The selective Computer Science Institute, which enrolls 100 students a year; involves a longer school day (for extra classes in computer science and programming), and graduates receive Microsoft Office Systems certification.

Practical education is often paired with academics, in Dewey's popular culinary arts program, its student-run cafÃ©, and other classes in entrepreneurship and business. Work/study in the cafÃ© allows students to learn restaurant and food prep skills, and earn pocket money working at the school. Culinary arts students craft chocolate roses for Valentine's Day, and make boned and baked turducken (a turkey stuffed with a duck and a chicken) for their Thanksgiving project.

For an ostensibly progressive institution, Dewey has many classrooms that are traditional, with desks set in neat rows and a teacher at the front of the room, chalk in hand. In a few rooms, innovative lessons inspired students to participate in engaged discussions while a small minority dozed on their desks, undisturbed. One social studies discussion was moderated by two teachers; despite a provocative topic dealing with race, immigration, and identity, students did not take much part in the discussion.

Most rooms were near-barren of student-made work or art, and hallways, lined by disused lockers, had bulletin boards filled largely by generic or pre-fab graphics. Many classrooms were thinly equipped with basic study materials, although

the information technology center was tech-rich and inviting. On the day we visited, one group of students took part in a live, two-way videoconference with high-school students on a Native American reservation in Washington State. The two groups actively participated in a discussion comparing homemade gliders constructed from shoeboxes. Notably, the class was a "collaborative team teaching" group, which combines special needs and general education students, and the students all worked well together.

In arts studios, students can study ceramics, painting, and other subjects. A 40-member dance ensemble performs regularly, and music instruction includes keyboards, brass, strings, woodwinds, percussion, and a school chorus. The student newspaper comes out twice a month.

The school works to dispel competitiveness, so it doesn't offer team sports, to many students' chagrin, and doesn't give conventional letter or percentage grades. For college applications, the school translates its grading method into more conventional percentage grades. In 2006, about half of Dewey's 545 graduates went on to CUNY schools, with significant fractions to SUNY campuses, private colleges, two-year programs, the military, and trade schools.

**English as a Second Language:** About 450 students are English language learners, ranging from new speakers (students arrive from overseas throughout the academic year) to those with some proficiency.

**Special education:** Dewey offers 11 collaborative team teaching (CTT) classes in subjects including English and math. The school also offers classes only for students with special needs.

**After school:** The school offers numerous clubs and activities, including robotics, Model Congress, an Italian club, and a mock trial team, along with intramural sports teams.

**Admissions:** Preference is given to District 21 residents. The Computer Science Institute is selective. Applicants should have a grade-point average of 90 or better and reading scores of Levels 3 or 4 on standardized tests. (*Helen Zelon, January 2007*)

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## Your Comments

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Because of its scores on state English and math tests, Dewey was added to the state's list of schools needing improvement. (April 2008)

"Parents don't have much to do with this whatsoever," says Wendy Shayo, Dewey's college advisor, of the college selection process. "Kids are much more engaged" than their parents in thinking about college, and many are the first in their families to aim for higher education. (January 2007)

"We expect them to be high performers so we can ramp up the work," says Assistant Principal Bruce Tamarin, of the school's Computer Science Institute students. (January 2007)

Jose Merced, assistant principal for science and a Dewey faculty member for 18 years, says "our students put in the extra time, and go the extra mile, to become lifelong learners." (January 2007)

A John Dewey student was awarded a 2006 New York Times College Scholarship. That student in turn named teacher Chung Chan a winner of the 2006 Teachers Who Make A Difference Award, also given out by the New York Times. (November 2006)

"This is the high school that most feels like college," a senior told Insideschools, because of the "independence and freedom and the way the schools works." That independence can be a pitfall for some students, he said, but "if you have the right mindset you'll be a success at Dewey." Another student said, "Cutting class and hanging out with friends can bring consequences," adding that "some people crash and burn but there's always time to get back on track." (October 2006)

Student Robert complains that "many robberies and serious fights on campus go unnoticed" because of inadequate safety measures. (April 2006)

"I like this school and think it's a safe school," writes teacher Jeffrey Yep. "The kids in the school are nice and generous." (March 2006)

"The staff is kind and the security is strict," writes student Jeffrey. "This school is getting better year by year, and we have a marvelous campus and grading system." (January 2006)

Anes, a freshman, writes that although he uses his free periods wisely, some students use theirs as an opportunity to cut class. "I would advise any type of student that's independent" to consider attending John Dewey, he writes. (November 2005)

"As a graduate of the class of 2002, I have to say that John Dewey HS was an excellent school," writes Rickey Brown. "I am in my third year of college and it has prepared me to be the successful student that I am today. Dewey do has its down falls," he writes, noting that it is "very easy and tempting to cut class." Still, he writes, "it s a fun school, you learn a lot about time management and how to use. I definitely would recommend this school to one who is ready to tackle high school at any angle." (August 2004)

A parent writes, "John Dewey is a good school but the transition for freshman students needs to be more strict, the freshman students don't need all the free time that they get. They need to monitor the freshman students more." She says that with all the free time the students are given, they can "cut classes and the parent won't know until one or two weeks down the line. By that time children are failing and it's too late for them to get help." (May 2004)

"The school is excellent," writes Julian, a student, who complains that some of the security guards have "attitudes." (April 2004)

Dewey is a "great school if you are determined," writes a student. She writes, "the grading system is very fair," and the "school offers a lot of art and dance as well at sports." However, she writes, "It is very easy to cut and even easier to not ever go to class. She adds, "people [at the school] steal a lot," but on the other hand, writes "there are so many different types of people to meet." (March 2003)

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