

A Q&A with Kevin Froner, Principal of Manhattan Hunter Science High School

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Wendy Dessy, Proskauer's Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility, sat down with Kevin Froner, principal of Manhattan Hunter Science, a high school affiliated with CUNY-Hunter College in New York City. Over the last five years Manhattan Hunter Science has emerged as one of the top public schools in America and was recently ranked 17th in the nation by Newsweek for serving high poverty populations. MHSHS is Proskauer's Adopt-a-School partner in New York City. Through Adopt-a-School, the Firm's signature education program, we develop skills and build relationships to motivate and inspire future leaders and help educate young people to their full potential. We provide introductions to a variety of careers, and leverage the core strengths, capabilities and expertise of our people in order to achieve these goals. We work with public and charter schools in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Washington, D.C.

Wendy: Please tell us about the unique model for your high school.

Kevin: Jennifer Raab, President of Hunter College launched MHSHS in 2003. She wanted to build a high school where students from diverse backgrounds could have access to an early college experience, a model that has proven to [substantially increase high school graduation rates, as well as college attainment and completion](#). Our school was founded in partnership with Hunter College, and all of our seniors take classes there. This provides many benefits to students: they experience college first-hand but under our guidance. We help manage their expectations and acclimate to the new surroundings. The students also take some college-level courses while still in high school. This provides all seniors, many of whom will be first-generation college students, with a preview of the college experience while they still have the support of Manhattan Hunter Science High School (MHSHS) and its faculty.

Wendy: Can you tell us a bit about the student population of Manhattan Hunter Science and how students are accepted into the school?

Kevin: Our school is built upon a foundation of diversity with a large black and Hispanic population. The population of our school and its demographics mirror those of the city. By some accounts, MSHS has the most competitive acceptance rate amongst all high schools in New York. According to [an article published last year by the New York Times](#), Manhattan Hunter Science had an acceptance rate of 1.7% with 6,472 applicants for only 108 spots.

Currently 60% of the student body live at or below the poverty line. Moving forward, at least 69% of each incoming class will be of the same socioeconomic status. Additionally, 15% of the student body qualifies for special education services.

The application for MSHS includes essays on why they as students want to be in the academically rigorous environment of MSHS and its early-college program. Prospective students must have strong academics, strong attendance records, and a strong desire to be there and to learn.

***Wendy:* According to *US News & World Report*, Manhattan Hunter Science has 99% graduation rate. This is significantly higher than that of New York City at 74.3% and New York State at 80.2%. What are some of the key factors that support this success?**

Kevin: We “shine a light” on any student who is falling behind and provide them with the resources they need. These include a homework center (which is open Monday-Thursday after school), social workers and guidance counselors, with an individualized approach for each student.

We set high expectations for the kids. There is a strong culture of success in our school and with the right mind-set, we can all succeed. That includes Advanced Placement for all. We enroll 100% of our junior class in an AP English Language & Composition course. We understand that writing is a critical skill for college and careers. This is one example of us knowing our kids and providing them with the tools to succeed.

A generous donor, Neil Janovic, provides free college tuition at Hunter College to all MSHS students who achieve a certain SAT/ACT score and maintain a specific GPA. Approximately 90% of our students receive acceptance at Hunter and about half attend. Many others attend the SUNY schools, NYU and other private schools. We sent our first graduate to MIT this year!

Wendy: Across the country public education is facing insufficient funding. How do you handle budget cuts or limited funding? What is the role of the principal in these situations and what advice do you have for others?

Kevin: MHSHS relies on the support of many partners in the private sector. In general, charter schools are great at fostering partnerships but public schools are not. No one entity, public or private, can solve the issues facing education on their own. It requires a collaborative approach to provide students and schools with all the resources they need.

Schools, school leaders, and their partners need to be creative and assertive when it comes to problem solving. They must think about how partners can supplement school programming and resources to best support the students. If all those in private sector invested in their schools, more schools could provide for their students in the ways we do at MHSHS.

Principals should look at each student as if he or she is their own child and base every decision off that mindset. What if this were my child? What would I want for them?

Wendy: How do you address wellness and mindfulness in your school? These kids are under so much pressure.

Kevin: The students are under a lot of pressure that earlier generations did not experience. Economic uncertainty along with social media and technology places a lot of stress on the kids. We created a Mindfulness Center for the students. Studies have shown that meditation can reduce stress and provide healthier, happier, and more focused students. Our center also offers yoga classes.

Wendy: Anything else our audience should know?

Kevin: Nothing closes the divide more than education, and this is what drives me every day, all day.

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