



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Amsterdam School/Hudson Honors Middle School

Public School 191/ Middle School 865

**210 West 61 Street
Manhattan
NY 10023**

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Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 191 is a small neighborhood elementary school in the Lincoln Center area. It underwent significant changes in 2002/03 when Hudson Honors School opened in the same building as part of the middle school choice program. The two units form one cohesive school under the leadership of one principal, each unit with their own assistant principal.

There are 302 students enrolled in the elementary school and 200 in the middle school. The student population comprises 44.6% Hispanic and 42.2% Black students with 8.2% White and the remainder from a range of racial and ethnic groups. There is a growing proportion, 6.4%, of English language learners with Spanish as the predominant first language. Nearly 20% of the school enrollment is special education students, half of whom are taught in self contained classes.

The school is Title I eligible with 72% of students qualifying. This is close to the City average. Overall attendance is 94.7%, which is better than similar schools in the City and the City average. Attendance is 93.8% in the elementary school and 95.6% in the middle school.

PS 191 introduced a gifted and talented program six years ago to provide for the breadth of achievement within the neighborhood. Each grade in the elementary school has a gifted and talented class and a general education class.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has established a culture of very high expectations among all who work in the school, which permeates every aspect of teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- The principal and assistant principals form a highly effective administration, united for a single purpose, with complementary skills and areas of expertise.
- Professional discussions about individual students are strategic and make good use of all relevant information.
- The planning and evaluation of professional development are instrumental in building success.
- The school's focus on embedding academic rigor into instructional practice and the curriculum is producing significant gains in achievement.
- Students are highly motivated by the increasing breadth, depth and quality of the curriculum.
- Well conceived and imaginative strategies for improving safety, behavior and students' personal development support the growth of well rounded young people with a thirst for learning.
- The school has established a small number of high functioning and accountable teams whose work has a clear purpose with articulated goals that are checked at regular intervals.
- Parents play an active leadership role and are instrumental in supporting students' achievement and in moving the school forward.
- Long standing partnerships with community organizations provide significant enrichment to students' experiences, particularly in the arts.

What the school needs to improve

- Look in depth at value-added data to establish rates of progress of individuals, cohorts and specific groups from point of entry to graduation.
- Continue to raise achievement in social studies and science by developing rigorous formative assessment tools to track students' progress.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the organization of the middle school in order to ensure the same degree of academic rigor and rising trends of performance that have been achieved in the elementary school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school with many outstanding features.

The principal is uncompromising in her plans to build for success by doing whatever it takes for her fellow administrators, staff and students to realize the school's very high expectations for their commitment, effort and stamina.

She has worked tirelessly and with great integrity to establish a culture of professional collegiality where reflection and candid evaluation are embedded in instructional practice and all aspects of professional development. She is clearly the leading professional who demonstrates a great depth of understanding of curriculum and assessment, and promotes high quality discussion and transparency in decision making. There is coherence and an impressive degree of consistency in much of the school's work. This is directly attributable to the principal's management ability and her refusal to deviate from the school's goals.

On her appointment, the principal rapidly and astutely evaluated the school's strengths and areas for improvement. With her staff, she developed well conceived and imaginative strategies to improve safety and behavior, and to give emphasis to students' personal development. She is sensitive to the demands of the situation and has adapted her leadership style as each stage of the school's long term strategy is accomplished.

In three years, the school has shown significant improvement in all content areas. The staff have been successful in realizing the vision for the school where all groups of students, whether in gifted and talented, general education or special education classes, experience a curriculum of increasing breadth, depth and quality. Academic fairs where students display and discuss their work in a particular content area provide ample proof of the way that the curriculum and a wide range of teaching and learning methodologies inspire students to aim high and taste genuine success which is acknowledged by others.

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 student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school is sharply analytical in disaggregating data from State tests and internal tests in order to compare the achievement of groups of students, classes and grades. Interim assessments that align well with the curriculum are used effectively to identify small steps for groups and individuals. Great emphasis is placed on the generation of authentic data from diagnostic assessments. Teachers are expected to compare test results with the academic profile that they have built up for each student and to check out the reasons for any disparity. Professional discussions about individual students are strategic and make constant reference to all relevant information.

Classroom teachers and the academic instruction team keep close track of individual students' progress. Equal attention is paid to ensuring that students grouped according to achievement all make similar rates of progress in the short and medium term. The school has not yet set up manageable systems to track the progress of individuals, groups and cohorts from point of entry to graduation in order to measure how much value the school adds.

The assistant principals have oversight of either English language learners or special education students from kindergarten through to grade 8. The progress of each group is monitored by a small team of staff with responsibilities across the grades. Assessment information is used very effectively to identify individual needs, to implement well tailored programs, to monitor students' progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. The literacy and mathematics coaches also have their finger on the pulse and make constant reference to the most recent data in fine tuning goals and providing closely targeted professional development and resources.

The school makes good use of comparative data to drive success on a broad front, comparing school results with similar and City schools. The administration is not currently focused on initiatives related to improving the achievement in relation to gender or ethnicity as the data does not indicate significant disparity in trends.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The professional development team is strategic in its use of data. The abridged Comprehensive Education Plan is predicated on high expectations. It has a few carefully chosen goals which are justified by significant data and explain clearly how success will be judged. In refining these goals, the administration and coaches have drawn on a wealth of academic research to add validity to their objectives.

The principles of learning underpin planning at every level. Academic rigor is being increased through strong collegiality and full involvement of staff in each stage of planning. The principal has been highly effective in establishing simple but effective structures to support the process. Everyone in the building is involved in a goal setting meeting and commits to work towards a goal of their choice and one that the principal selects.

The school has established effective assessment tools to provide diagnostic feedback on individual students' progress. Collaboration with the Teachers' College and the work of the coaches have both been instrumental in refining ways to evaluate independent writing and in establishing baseline assessments in mathematics that relate to the content areas and strands of Everyday Math. Great effort has been put into finding ways to measure those aspects of learning that are not so readily quantifiable. For example, teachers have successfully developed a school reading log as a reliable tool to measure volume and stamina in relation to reading and one which also holds students accountable.

The thoroughness of the school's approach to generating and using assessment information prevents students from slipping through the net. The school has effective strategies to support those students most at risk. The academic intervention team ensures

that no stone is left unturned in choosing the right program of support for each individual student and monitoring their progress at monthly intervals.

The school continues to work hard to involve as many parents as possible in understanding what their children are learning and how they can best support them. Parents consider that relationships with teachers are excellent and welcome the fact that their concerns are followed up immediately. They appreciate the diligent work of the very well organized parent coordinator in promoting good communication.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school has been successful in raising achievement at the same time as improving the breadth, depth and quality of the curriculum. This is because academic rigor underpins the development of every curriculum area. Students are increasingly benefiting from well resourced and engaging experiences that help them make connections and widen their horizons. This in turn has resulted in high levels of motivation. At the academic fair, for example, all elementary grade students celebrated what they had been learning in social studies with their teachers, fellow students and parents.

There is rigor in every aspect of the curriculum for English language arts and mathematics. Decisions relating to instructional practice, curriculum development and planning for individuals, groups and grades are driven by insightful use of data. Most teachers are effective in meeting the needs of different groups within the same class because they are skilled in identifying next steps in learning, although not all teachers are yet fully skilled in planning differentiated activities for individuals. The school has used the concept of ‘backwards design’ intelligently to develop the curriculum in science and social studies. This provides continuity in learning and the progressive development of knowledge, skills and understanding. The school has not yet fully developed the rigorous formative assessments that would enable teachers to track students’ achievement as they move through the school from elementary to middle although this is a work in progress.

The principal has developed a culture of strategic thinking and accountability through encouraging and enabling constant reflection and striving for excellence. She has very high expectations of herself and of her staff and goes to great lengths to help them reach their goals. This was summed up by teachers as ‘accountability with a capital A, but with good support from inside and outside the school.’

The administration has little room to maneuver with the budget. However, all decisions relating to the spending and allocation of resources are driven by the school’s goals and the principal’s firm belief in setting teachers up for success. Careful selection of additional staff and the creative use of part-time teachers have enabled the principal to provide additional support and expertise efficiently. Creative use of the budget to pay teachers for curriculum development time has enabled the school to forge ahead.

The school has well established procedures for promoting good attendance and punctuality. The main reason for the improving rates of attendance, however, is because students enjoy learning and are being encouraged to aspire to success.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Parents, staff and students all recognize the impact that the principal has made in sharpening up routines and processes so that nothing gets in the way of learning. The planning and evaluation of professional development are exemplary and instrumental in building success. Collegiality has been promoted to encourage professional discussions and to stamp out isolation.

The principal has established clear criteria for the selection process for new staff and has high expectations for all teachers in their ability to understand and use data. Classroom observations are regularly undertaken and teachers receive high quality verbal and written feedback to enable them to improve their instructional practice and to identify their professional development needs.

Professional development is driven by high quality information and focused on whole school and individual goals. The administration is constantly involved in evaluating teaching and learning in order to enable individual teachers to reach their personal goals and to monitor for academic rigor and consistency in implementing the programs chosen to support the school's curriculum. Teachers feel well supported by the administrators, coaches and colleagues, whether experienced teachers or newcomers to the school or the profession, and are confident to give and seek advice.

The school has formed longstanding and fruitful partnerships with local institutions and organizations such as the Lincoln Center, Peace Games and Studio-in-a-School to expand students' learning experiences and widen their horizons. Its close association with the Teachers' College has been fundamental in enabling the principal to turn her vision for the school into a reality by exposing her teachers to high quality professional development.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has developed rapidly on many fronts in a relatively short time. A small number of high functioning teams have been established whose work has a clear purpose with articulated goals that are checked at regular intervals. The school's action planning drives work at classroom, grade and team level. As the principal explains "Nothing is done for window dressing or without checking fitness for purpose."

Teachers have been empowered to live the principal's vision by developing leadership roles. They are given practical experience of understanding what constitutes rigorous evaluation through being involved in learning walks. Advanced and detailed schedules for all aspects of school life and work enable everyone to plan ahead and to manage their time well. The school leadership team is actively involved in decision making and the parents association is kept well informed through regular dissemination of data.

Through constant efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of its actions and by comparing progress across classes and grades throughout the school, the administration has identified that the rate of acceleration is more rapid in the grades kindergarten to 5 than in grades 6 to 8. Although teachers in the middle school are equally hard working and have developed the same levels of professional collegiality, the organizational structure is not promoting the same degree of academic rigor. The school has identified this as the next challenge and has demonstrated a strong capacity to tackle the issue with the same commitment to achieving success.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Amsterdam School / Hudson Honors Middle School (PS191 / MS865)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			X
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 student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 			X
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and 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 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X