



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Midtown West School

Public School 212

**328 West 48th Street
New York
NY 10036**

Principal: Dean Ketchum

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Reviewer: Sheldon Berman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Midtown West School in Manhattan serves 364 students in kindergarten through grade 5. The student population is ethnically diverse with about 40% white, 30% Hispanic, 20% Black, and 10% Asian and others. The attendance rate of 94%, student stability rate of 96%, and 4.1% enrollment of recent immigrants are all like those in similar schools, while fewer students are Title I eligible at 24.2%. About 12% are special education students, and only about 5% are English language learners. The school has received no Title I funding in the last three school years.

Midtown West is in the theatre district and shares its building with a high school for students working in the performing arts.

This is the second year for the current principal. The administration and teaching staff are relatively young, with only 46% of the teachers having more than five years experience. There are also many student teachers, adding to the feeling of a very youthful staff.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal, supported by an able assistant principal, provides attentive, effective, and inspirational leadership to all constituencies of the school community.
- The very dedicated professional staff have built a collegial ethos and culture that supports the on-going drive for improvement.
- The integration of parents is exemplary, and they actively participate in supporting the school culture, planning, and activities.
- The utilization of community resources is well developed, highlighted by the integration of local businesses and artists in continuously evolving curriculum projects.
- A coherent curriculum framework with a social studies theme provides an authentic integration of the school with the community at large.
- A constructivist approach to teaching is well integrated into the culture of the school, with an emphasis on developing critical thinking and problem-solving.
- A focus on clear, effective, and respectful communications in the classroom, among staff, and with parents adds significantly to a sense of community for all.
- The two-year 'looping' of teachers with their students and the involvement of parents in setting specific educational goals both add to the school's ability to use all data to individualize education for every child.
- The halls and classrooms are alive with student work and engaging artefacts.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure more consistent implementation of engaging discourse and differentiated instructional practices to better target specific students' understandings and needs.
- Ensure there is regular monitoring and evaluation of how well plans are being implemented and their effectiveness in reaching stated goals.
- Develop benchmark skills and concepts that clearly delineate expected understandings across grade levels, especially between 'loops'.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

Midtown West is providing an effective and stimulating environment for students, staff and parents. The current principal is a gifted leader who has fostered many improvements and strong support. There is warm and respectful climate, and an attention to details, especially with communications, that contributes to a sense of dignity and community.

Teaching is focused on both content and process, with many opportunities for professional dialogue around the continuing development of meaningful curriculum and effective instructional practice. The culture among the staff is collaborative, supportive and student-centered. Children are clearly valued as individuals, and their personal growth is continuously monitored and attended to. Families are well integrated into the school.

The halls and classrooms of the school area upstairs are invitingly decorated with much work from class and student projects.

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 administrators and teachers pay close attention to gathering data from formal and informal sources. Results from standardized tests are studied to isolate significant trends. Comparisons are made across grades and groups and with similar schools to suggest adjustments to curricular focus points or to identify needs for additional support opportunities. Grade teams work together to identify or create common instruments for assessing students' skills and knowledge upon entering each grade. For returning students, recommendations from previous teachers are gleaned for trends to impact grade-level planning as well as information useful in planning for individual students. Particular attention is given to students with a history of difficulty or identification of having special needs. All of these monitoring efforts result in targeted instruction for individual students.

In addition to reflecting on State and City test results, teachers continuously use a variety of informal assessments to provide quantitative data about students. Standardized test performance is compared with the classroom experience to ensure that inconsistencies are identified and explored. Conferencing notes are maintained for each student and used routinely to adjust instruction. At the end of the year, teachers prepare an in-depth narrative on each student that passes along with the student to the next year. These narratives synthesize quantitative data provided by standardized and alternative assessments, as well as qualitative data about work habits, socialization skills, developmental growth, behavior, and affinities and special talents. As a result, teachers do not lose time getting to know their students.

There is a continuing effort to refine strategies for gathering and incorporating data. The principal and instructional support staff network with their colleagues in other schools to exchange ideas and approaches to define best practice. For example, student work is used to characterize appropriate development in writing across the grade spectrum, resulting in improved teacher ability to give targeted feedback to students.

While the analysis of data is applied directly to planning for the individual student and grade and loop teams, there is not yet enough definition of benchmarks and expectations across the loops, nor analysis of students' performance by ethnicity.

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.

School test data and commentaries of individual students are reviewed by the administrators and used to make groupings. They are also used in the formulation of the Comprehensive Education Plan. This contains collaboratively set whole-school goals, based on data on student performance. The school also sets academic goals for students in grades 3 through 5 collectively, based on previous performance. Enrichment is included in goals to provide a range of opportunity for students and address the needs of higher-achieving students. Additionally, along with guidance from the district office, the principal and assistant principal use their observations and request recommendations from the teachers to identify professional development goals and create specific implementation plans and timelines.

Teachers' use of information to detect early signs of students having difficulties means that, in the main, students do not get far behind without timely interventions. The academic intervention team uses a variety of additional assessment as needed, to understand the difficulties of struggling and at-risk students and prescribe appropriate interventions. Support for special education students is effective, with a higher proportion of students than in similar schools reaching Levels 3 and 4 in English language arts in particular.

Extended instructional time is mostly focused on mathematics as careful analysis of data has shown that more attention is needed in that area. An example of the school's focus on alignment is provided by the efforts in this content area. Noting the student performance figures, it was decided to test all 2nd graders using the Slosson Diagnostic Mathematics Screener. A benchmark score indicating proficiency was defined, and students not yet proficient were targeted for the small group help in the morning mathematics classes. Support to English language learners in mathematics is not yet having the impact the school would like, and fewer of these students achieve as well in mathematics as in similar schools.

Staff work very well together to achieve the school's goals for individuals and groups of students. They are united behind the school's approach to provide student-centered instruction in which the social studies curriculum is integrated across content areas.

High expectations are shared with parents, who are invited to multiple conversations focused on the needs and performance of their children.

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.

As an exempt school, Midtown West has flexibility about the curriculum it chooses. The school is invested in a constructivist approach with a focus on social studies, and there is a well-developed sequence of engaging units of study that start with the family in kindergarten, including a dinner for the class at every student’s home, and lead through the grades to an increasingly global perspective. The connection with Bank Street College results in continual development of new and engaging project ideas, adding interest for both teachers and students, and utilizing the strengths, interests and connections of all. Appropriate attention is given to all content areas, and often combines them to form integrated theme-based curriculum. For example, a fairy tale the students had created in kindergarten was used as the basis for writing, staging and performing a Broadway-like play, including researching roles in theater productions. Similarly, since the data showed that students performed well in English language arts on standardized tests, a school-wide focus on writing was used to come from an area of strength to support other content areas.

Data is routinely used to guide the teachers in their grade and content area curricular decisions. While not yet consistently applied, all teachers are focused on developing their conferencing skills and approaches to incorporating their analysis of individual students’ needs into planning for differentiated groupings and assignments. This is frequently a point of discussions in grade level and content area work, and in directed conversations between administrators and teachers in response to frequent informal observations or their participation in team and other teacher conversations.

The administration and student intervention team closely monitor programs and services in place to provide extra support to identified students, and evaluates their effectiveness using performance data from teachers and standardized testing. The allocation of budget, time and staff positions is well used to marshal resources where needed as indicated by analysis of the data.

The school uses two-year ‘looping’, so that students stay with the same teacher for kindergarten and grade 1, grades 2 and 3, then again for grades 4 and 5. This practice results in deepened personal relationships between teachers and the students and their families. Both teachers and parents commented on the positive impact this has on reinforcing the school-home connection including frequent communications regarding students’ attendance, punctuality and performance. In fact, families commit to six hours per month of service to the school community, and parents are deeply integrated as participating partners in all school endeavors. Often there is not enough room to get all of the attending parents into meeting or performance settings.

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.

Through the leadership of the principal, the school has been able to attract an able assistant principal and many dynamic teachers. Commitment to the school community,

one's own continuing professional growth, and collegial sharing are all values that are clearly expressed in words and deeds by the staff, and expected as a value in new hires.

Professional development is a strength. This year, the school is focusing on writing across the school, using student writing as a focus of professional development, and collecting samples to illustrate the development of writing skills across the grade levels. The use of conferencing and running records were agreed to as pedagogical strategies for school-wide integration as routine classroom practices. On-going efforts with professional development are well integrated through content area, grade and looping team meetings, as well as in a whole-school group. The emphasis on writing, supporting mathematics, and developing new curriculum projects has given focus to many of the professional conversations in formal meetings and informal exchanges.

The principal has instigated dramatic improvement to communications, including making procedures well understood and followed across the school to create an orderly and smoothly functioning organization. The principal is also diligent in developing parent and community support for the school in pursuit of its goals, and to target it where it is most beneficial. For example, when the art position needed to be cut from the budget, many art-related resources were found in the form of artists in residence and Studio in a School to fill the void. Similarly, authors and professionals in the community help plan and implement school projects.

The principal is well respected by the staff for his experience, and teachers describe both administrators as giving useful constructive criticisms in response to frequent observations. The administrators encourage team interaction at all levels, and creatively provide opportunities for professional exchange, resulting in a collegial ethos and rapidly developing pedagogical skills among the teachers.

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 administration has fortified structures for making and monitoring medium- and long-range goals and plans for the development of the professional staff as well as the school community. These are reviewed regularly, and adjustments made quickly when needed. Teachers, support staff, and parents are fully included in school planning, resulting in a high level of commitment for goals and support of efforts towards reaching the goals. The goals are defined in both broad terms and include specific plans that allow for flexibility and revision.

The process of developing the Comprehensive Education Plan reflects this effort, as does planning for professional and curriculum development, with voice being given to all concerned via the school leadership team, faculty meetings, the parent teacher association, the academic intervention team, grade and loop level and content area meetings. The focus on continual attention pervades the interactions around assessing and supporting the progress of individual students, classes, and identified groups of students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Midtown West School (PS 212)	∅	✓	+
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