



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Manhattan East Center for Arts and Academics

**Middle School 224
410 East 100 Street
New York
NY 10029**

Principal: Lillian Sarro

Dates of review: May 2 – 3, 2007

Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Manhattan East School for Arts and Academics Middle School caters for the needs of 266 gifted and talented and learning disabled students who are also interested in the visual or performing arts. The school is comprised of 33.5% Hispanic students, which is higher than similar school averages, 35.5% Black students which is also higher than similar schools and slightly higher than City averages, 24.8% White and 6.2% Asian and other nationalities (ethnicities). Nine percent of the population is special education students. Currently only 2 students are English language learners whose main language is Spanish. The school attracts high achieving students from all boroughs who have an accelerated program and complete Honors and Regents classes before entering high school.

The school has no Title 1 funding. The school attendance is 95% which is higher than that of similar schools and higher than New York City averages. The high attendance figure represents the students' commitment to the school. The students represent the four boroughs of New York City, with more than half of them traveling over an hour before arriving at school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students are excited by the rigorous arts infused academic curriculum and they achieve very well.
- The small size of the school allows all staff to collaborate effectively, which results in teachers understanding the performance and progress of each student very well.
- The school has an open door policy and parents, teachers and students speak very positively about the support the principal gives.
- Parents are partners in the students' learning journey, are positive about the academic rigor and support their children well.
- Faculty members are committed to the education of the students, readily giving their own time to respond to the students' personal and academic needs.
- The wide range of electives actively engages all students and adds another dimension to their educational development.
- Students are given academic responsibilities and act as tutors, and as a consequence their peers' learning accelerates.
- The diverse needs of the student population are well catered for and all students make good progress.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the scope of the Comprehensive Education Plan by formalizing planning and setting quantifiable goals, timeframes and recording evaluations.
- Refine teachers' planning to include and extend differentiated instruction to meet the needs of individual students and groups of students.
- Further share good practice and make all teacher assessments and portfolios as good as the best.
- Consider more extensive use of technology to support collaborative planning and track student progress.
- Further integrate students with the greatest need into the whole school

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Manhattan East Center for Arts and Academics provides a safe caring environment for all its students. The principal is passionate about the school, her staff and students. She spends as much time as possible in classrooms or talking to students, and as a consequence she knows how each student is performing and the progress they are making. Parents, staff and students work together and make the school a success. Students enjoy learning and as a result of receiving a rigorous, broad curriculum many students are accepted into performing arts schools, specialized science schools and highly acclaimed independent high schools.

Teachers set high standards and students outperform similar schools and New York City schools in all tested areas. The progress of special education students is tracked and they make good progress. However there are very few formalized plans in place other than the Comprehensive Education Plan. There are many positive initiatives happening but there is no systematic recording of these or formal evaluation of their effectiveness across the school.

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 proficient.

The school has very structured admission procedures for its gifted and talented students. All students are screened and must be achieving at grade or above grade level before they are interviewed. Students speak very positively about their excitement in visiting the school before being accepted. The day includes undertaking tests and students and parents visiting lessons. This gives the school a clear picture of the performance of each student prior to their entry and guides selection.

The school uses Princeton review as its interim assessment tool in addition to mandated tests. The majority of teachers are using a commercial software program to interrogate data to track the progress of the students in their classes, at group and individual level. This detailed knowledge of each student's learning drives instruction and identifies individual students' learning requirements. At present there is uncertainty as to how this program integrates with other school systems and how the use of the program will be developed. This results in some comparisons in performance being made, but inconsistent practice across the school. For example, in English language arts, two teachers work very closely together and compare student performance both within and across grades and discuss which strategies are effective. There is however no strategic plan to move the use of data forward and the quality of teachers' individual assessment portfolios is variable. The school carefully tracks the progress of special education students but does not make comparisons between other groups of students, between classes, across grades, or the school's past performance or to that of similar schools.

The students, teachers and the principal are in constant dialogue about student progress and this results in students knowing how they are performing and what they need to do to improve. The principal keeps accurate records of each student's performance and effectively uses these in her daily classroom visits to check progress. Half way through each marking period teachers identify and contact parents whose students are working below the eightieth percentile, indicating where improvements need to be made. However no records are kept on the effectiveness of this positive intervention.

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 proficient.

Staff, students and parents speak very positively about the small size of the school which results in a collegial atmosphere where all students are well known and can be challenged individually. Students are very committed to learning and teachers give tirelessly of their time to support them. Such positive attitudes contribute to standards that are very high. In the majority of classes feedback on student work is effective and the portfolios in mathematics and English language arts are of high quality. Portfolios move from grade to grade and enable teachers to plan and set individual goals appropriately.

Goals and plans in the Comprehensive Education Plan are shared with teachers and the school works towards achieving these goals. However, these goals are not yet sufficiently measurable or quantifiable to allow for specific evaluation as to how far they have been achieved. Similarly, timeframes are not specified to set interim deadlines for the achievement of improvement goals. The data from formal assessments and interim assessments drives individual teacher planning and is shared across all subject areas. The data from English language arts assessments is effectively used in social studies to inform planning and this results in students being appropriately challenged.

All teachers keep detailed individual records of student progress and these are discussed both formally and informally. The small size of the school helps this to be effective. The special education students are well supported. They are grouped in two self-contained classes and receive their science and math classes from the science and math specialist teachers. The students like this variety of experience and enjoy working in this way. Their progress is good and is further helped as in electives they are integrated with the other students. All students benefit from this socially and academically. Teachers identify students at risk of falling behind during each of the marking periods. These students receive after school support and are tutored in their weak areas during the school day. The school appreciates that some students are reluctant to take this extra support and prefer to be involved in electives. Some special education students expressed a desire to be more integrated into the mainstream of the school.

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 curriculum provides a challenging, rigorous arts-infused academic program that meets the needs of highly motivated gifted and talented students. The gifted and talented program aligns itself well to the mandated curriculum. Students enjoy their work, receive Spanish as a foreign language in sixth, seventh and eighth grades and complete Regents Earth Science before entering high school. Students’ performance is high and they feel that they are intellectually challenged. The school places great emphasis on the writing process and all students are encouraged to find their own literacy voice and to assume responsibility for their written work. These strategies result in students performing well above similar schools.

The principal visits classrooms on a daily basis and her philosophy is one of support rather than formalized accountability. This results in a variation in teacher planning and a lack of differentiation in instruction. A minority of students are not learning as much as they might as they are insufficiently challenged. The students, parents, staff and the principal use all available data to understand progress at an individual student level. Colleagues talk to each other on a daily basis and plans are adapted as required. However, all students’ individual needs are not fully met as planning is not sufficiently differentiated.

The school’s priority in terms of budgeting is to ensure that students are effectively taught and in order to deliver the wide curriculum spread there is little flexibility on other spending priorities. The school makes the best use possible of its limited space and is looking forward to a refurbished laboratory in order to extend students’ practical experiential experiences.

Students are very motivated and ably identify what makes a good lesson. Their desire to learn means that they are actively engaged. They describe the best lessons as, ‘when the teacher is actively engaged with you’. They take on responsibility and in mathematics speak positively of being tutors and helping their peers. There is great respect between staff and students and students’ motivation is evidenced by their high attendance which supports their overall outstanding achievements.

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 proficient.

Parents speak very positively of the principal’s ability to hire staff of exceptional quality. Teachers are chosen for their strong intellectual interests and personal commitment to the students. Teachers care for and support the students particularly well. Students respond well to opportunities such as gaining awards for excellence.

Teachers are motivated and always strive to do better, and their professional development activities are wide spread. The focus for the current year, identified in the Comprehensive Education Plan, is interdisciplinary teaching. Effective links have been made between mathematics and science and English language arts and social studies but as yet there is

not a whole school focused plan that sets targets to improve individual student performance. Nor is there a plan to allow teachers to observe each other's practice. The principal gives teachers the choice regarding their individual professional development and feels that this makes staff feel respected and valued. Teachers continually talk to each other about students' progress and discuss training outcomes and as a consequence their professional development is proficient.

The principal is very 'hands on' and spends large parts of every day in classrooms working with students and observing teaching. Students like the fact that she is involved with what they do and teachers feel well supported. Parents describe the principal as 'a person who gently leads'. This results in some teachers being further ahead in their learning journey than others due, in part, to there being no recording or target setting from these informal observations. The faculty meets on a monthly basis to look closely at student progress and informally on a daily basis. The curriculum breadth does not allow for collaborative planning time within the school day but teachers meet at lunchtimes and after school. Through collaboration all decisions about instruction are made by the teachers, who develop curriculum plans related to their discipline which are very specifically informed by analysis of data and results.

The school has many partnerships with arts organizations and community groups which effectively support the educational program. These add another dimension to the uniqueness of school's wide ranging visual and performing arts program.

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 proficient.

The goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan are worked towards but there are currently no formalized interim action goals or plans within the overall plan. There is also little opportunity taken to compare progress across departments and classes. Desired outcomes are clearly communicated to teachers but are not formally recorded with defined responsibilities and timeframes.

The progress towards interim assessment targets is monitored but the positive interventions that are implemented are not evaluated to measure their precise impact. However revision of plans does take place proficiently. The small size of the school results in teachers knowing the students extremely well as individuals and supporting their progress on this basis. Information from assessments is used in discussion to plan for individuals and groups and to evaluate their progress. Although teachers effectively support their students' needs the lack of documentation and objectively measurable goals means that some students are not making as much progress as they might. The energy of the principal results in very positive support for faculty, but the lack of formalization of planning and recording limits the school's capacity to achieve its goals.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Manhattan East Center for Arts and Academics (MS224)	∅	✓	+
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	