



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Hudson River Middle School

Intermediate School 289

**201 Warren Street
New York
NY 10282**

Principal: Ellen Foote

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Reviewer: Stephanie Krusa

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Intermediate School 289 provides a nurturing environment for its middle school students, who are carefully recruited to reflect the diversity in the City. There are 294 students enrolled, and of those, 14% are Black, 14% are Hispanic, 36% are Asian and 36% are White. This year there are two students who are English language learners, a significantly lower proportion than is found in most of the City schools.

There are 31 students, approximately 11%, who are special education learners, some of whom are in self-contained class serving students in grades 6 through 8. All others are in general education classes and receive services. Attendance has consistently been higher than that of similar and City schools, this year reaching 97%. The school does not receive Title 1 funding.

They share the building with Public School 89, and elementary and middle school classes are mingled on every floor. The school has the support of an active parent teacher association and ongoing collaborations with Teachers' College, The New York University Child Study Center, the Mercantile Exchange, Manhattan Youth and the Battery Park City Authority.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is well respected and has proven ability as a highly effective and innovative instructional leader.
- The staff demonstrate the ability to organize and analyze data and are developing capacity to target instruction to enhance student learning.
- The staff group is highly collegial, sharing best practices, and continually refining teaching methods in support of student understanding.
- The school considers the whole child, providing comprehensive services to address academic, social and emotional needs.
- Staff convey high expectations to students, requiring them to think critically and construct their own learning.
- The arts-rich integrated curriculum engages students and provides opportunities for authentic performance-based assessment.
- The school environment is warm and welcoming, with exemplary student writing and art work colorfully displayed throughout the building.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to strive for new ways to collect and organize data to pinpoint instructional needs of students who require additional support.
- Evaluate effectiveness of the school's assessment practices and continue to refine and supplement these, to support student understanding.
- Continue to build capacity for differentiation and formalize communication among staff to provide unified support for students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with several well-developed components.

The principal and staff at Intermediate School 289 work exceptionally well together in support of their very high-performing school. There are obvious common strands among the schools in the building, most evident in the impressive student artwork and projects on display throughout this welcoming building. These reflect the arts-rich interdisciplinary curriculum created by the staff.

The school very effectively uses data to plan a challenging and engaging curriculum, and to revise it yearly, based on student achievement. It also carefully considers data when designing professional development, to ensure it matches needs identified by the staff. Data is not yet being sufficiently used to assess student learning, in part because formal interim assessments are not implemented. This in turn limits the school's ability to set interim goals and effectively differentiate instruction, particularly for students who are struggling.

All constituents share high expectations and take great care in considering academic, social and emotional dimensions of every student. Through a unique partnership with the New York University Child Study Center, the school provides comprehensive clinical support for students who are not performing as expected. In addition, staff are supported in literacy, mathematics and science through long-term collaborations with a range of organizations.

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 diligently gathers data from a range of detailed school-based assessments such as portfolios, conferring notes, quizzes and tests, performance and project demonstrations. However, it does not participate in the City interim assessment program. Thus, student baselines are the previous year's standardized test scores. Because of this, ongoing assessment data for students, particularly those who need additional support, are not yet sufficiently developed. The school is aware of this, and the principal is reviewing several interim assessments, to determine which will provide the best diagnostic information about student learning. In particular she is interested in tools that can more closely profile individual student strengths and needs, and offer additional strategies for individualized instruction. Additionally, the principal is evaluating the effectiveness of some school assessments, which will be revised based on findings.

Using available data, the school carefully monitors the progress of all students and groups, and takes appropriate measures to address needs and build on successes. The principal meets regularly with a cohort of middle school principals, all from schools which are similar in size and makeup, to discuss and compare performance across schools

and for disaggregated groups. This information is effectively shared with constituents to contextualize efforts to assess and differentiate for improved student achievement.

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 with well-developed features.

The school’s Comprehensive Education Plan is a highly reflective review of the previous year’s work, with resultant new goals and a timeframe for areas for improvement. Goals include ongoing professional development and further development of the use of interdisciplinary projects. The latter addresses the school-wide focus on engaging students in constructing meaning through authentic project based learning.

In ongoing work with staff developers, teachers have set clear benchmarks, defined as developmentally appropriate achievement goals for content at each grade level, and for inter-disciplinary projects. Benchmarks provide staff with an excellent framework for the ongoing process of assessing student progress and evaluating effectiveness of the taught curriculum. Progress toward benchmarks is incrementally developed over three years with mastery expected as students prepare to graduate. Benchmarks are used to assess student progress on grade, across grade and for groups of students.

The pupil personnel committee is unique in that faculty from the New York University Child Study Team participate along with school staff. The whole child is carefully considered by this committee which provides high-level clinical support for students at risk because of social and emotional needs. Discussion and decision-making focus on interventions, with incremental goals set and assessed month to month. Less evident is a focus on specific academic needs. Rather, this is work the principal has defined for grade level teachers, working together as academic interventions teams, with specific support from the special education and curriculum specialists who structure intervention plans and provide professional development. However, communication between teachers and instructional specialists is not sufficiently developed or formalized. The principal has acknowledged this as an area for improvement.

The school provides ample extended-day opportunities for students in need of academic intervention services and most of the targeted students participate. Activities are designed to address learning benchmarks for the assembled group, rather than addressing individual student needs. Besides the extended day program, these students receive in-class support and attend courses designed to address specific needs. The school wisely provides interventions that are based on student strengths, to build self-esteem and student engagement. For example, the cohort of students who struggle academically have opportunities to excel in the drama, fine arts, and music programs.

Staff enjoy excellent relationships with parents and convey high expectations for students through dissemination of curriculum benchmarks and ongoing communication about student work. Parents are pleased with the academic rigor and the caring culture of the school, and feel their children are well prepared for high school. Students reflect high expectations for themselves, as they describe current understanding, outline next steps and explain why this learning is important. Clearly, this community works together to support high achievement.

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 proficient with well-developed features.

In this small school, there is a focus on continued improvement, as seen in the comprehensive professional development program carefully designed to support the single highly qualified content area teacher on each grade. The principal proactively allocates funds so that consultants provide support in literacy, mathematics, science and social studies. In addition to developing the City-aligned curriculum, content consultants push in, providing staff development through modeling, co-teaching and conferring with students. This is followed by a highly supportive debriefing session to critique engagement, response to the lesson, and assess progress toward goals. Staff developers meet together to plan across content areas and to support integrated project design.

Because all staff developers work in classrooms, they are able to help teachers to pinpoint student needs and match strategies for students who are struggling. However, differentiating instruction for this cohort of students needs additional focus and strengthening. The principal has been building staff capacity to differentiate instruction across the curriculum. For instance, a class in social communication was organized to support the one English language learner and other students, conversant in English, but not participating in classroom discourse.

Teachers use the process modeled by staff developers to effectively support each other’s work. They also meet across the grades, to assess progress toward benchmarks at each level, and plan for gaps that might emerge. For example, based on analysis of student verbal and written responses, the author’s study was recently revised to be more rigorous at each grade. Teachers are highly accountable and focused on improvement. The budget, scheduling and staffing are well used to support learning.

At 97%, attendance is a reflection of student engagement, obvious in all classes. Every effort is made to provide appropriately challenging experiences that enable students to construct meaning and stretch their thinking. Students feel respected and supported, reporting that there are many staff members they can talk with about issues in or out of school.

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.

The principal has been purposeful in selecting and developing a highly effective, collegial staff. Teachers are chosen for their professional skill, understanding of the adolescent learner and commitment to the school’s high standards for shared inquiry among students and staff. The principal is well respected as a strong and innovative instructional leader, and under her, the staff work well together, planning and evaluating results and revising based on evidence of learning. In addition, the school is efficiently and effectively organized and the day flows smoothly.

Student performance data is carefully analyzed, compared against school benchmarks, and against that of similar schools to guide revisions and improve student achievement. Data analysis also drives professional development. For example, when it was determined that writing across content areas should be strengthened, a consultant was brought in for a specially designed course which was offered to all staff. In addition, all teachers participate in optional, after-school study groups, on topics organized around their surveyed needs. Teachers share best practices through inter-visitations on-site, and with similar schools. To illustrate, literacy staff have been asked by Teachers College to mentor teachers in a similar school on Staten Island in exemplary balanced literacy practices.

Besides regular formal teacher evaluations, the principal frequently observes and confers with staff to support professional growth. She also, on a regular basis, models and co-teaches mathematics lessons for the self-contained class. These efforts dovetail with the overall plan for continued growth and development for students and staff.

Key collaborations with universities and community organizations have been established to help realize the goal of nurturing the whole child, best evidenced through collaborations with New York University. The relaxed yet highly structured environment also supports the academic, social and emotional development of the middle school students in attendance.

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 school has a flexible process for reviewing and refining program and practices. This is most evident in curriculum design, implementation and assessment for results, which characterize the cycle staff reflexively follow throughout the year. Teachers compare student progress toward content benchmarks in and across grades and with that of similar schools. A wide range of qualitative school data is analyzed to measure student learning and revise curriculum goals, as indicated.

In this high-performing school, most students thrive, as curriculum is developed and revised. However, diagnostic assessments for students requiring academic interventions, including those with individual education plans, are not frequent enough and do not adequately cover the range of needs for this cohort. As a result, goal and planning revisions are not personally responsive enough. The principal rightly identifies the need to strengthen assessment and differentiation to better serve these students, and is actively addressing this need with staff.

This strength of this school is its highly committed staff and focus on professional development. The principal and teachers continually strive to perfect practice and improve student achievement, always with long-range goals in mind, with reflective review at year's end providing the departure point for new planning.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Hudson River Middle School (MS 289)	∅	✓	+
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	