



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Muscota New School

Public School 134

**4862 Broadway
New York
NY 10034**

Principal: Judith Menken

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Reviewer: Jeff Plumb

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Muscota New School is a small progressive elementary school which serves students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. There are 69% Hispanic students, 20% White, 7% African American and 4% Asian. The school has 32 special education students. Fifty-two students are English language learners. Attendance is in line with similar schools and above City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 66% of its students.

The school has Empowerment Schools Status, which means it has autonomy to make key decisions and freedom over how it uses its budget. It can provide its own professional development or purchase it from whatever source it chooses. It can network with whatever schools it chooses and benefits from less reporting and paperwork requirements than is typical of other City schools. As a Design Your Own assessment school it is engaged in a research project to design its own periodic assessments.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides good leadership.
- This is a family school where teachers, parents and students learn together.
- Students engage enthusiastically with their learning and the emotional and social development of students is good.
- The thematic curriculum design means that students develop key enquiry and investigational skills through interesting project work.
- Special education students are well supported and achieve well.
- The focus on the arts promotes excitement and enjoyment in learning.
- Data is used well to improve the curriculum and instructional practice.
- Students are involved in setting their own goals to raise their achievement.
- Student progress is well tracked.
- Collaborative teamwork on the part of staff benefits students.

What the school needs to improve

- Make better use of assessment to inform daily assignments for students.
- Systemize existing assessment tools so that they can be applied more consistently between classes and grades.
- Continue to develop periodic assessments for use in mathematics.
- Improve the consistency of learning styles for students when they move across from one grade to the next.
- Continue to ensure consistency in communication with parents.
- Further develop long term strategic planning for whole school goals.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

Since its inception fourteen years ago, the principal has successfully developed this school as a home-school collaborative organization where parents, teachers and students learn together. Her leadership style and open door policy are appreciated by all stakeholders in the school community. As a Design Your Own school it has made good progress in developing its own periodic assessment materials for English language arts, but is at a much earlier stage of development in respect of mathematics.

A good range of data is generated and used effectively to track the progress of individual students. The use of data to compare its performance against other progressive schools or to compare the performance of one ethnic group against another is under-developed. Learning styles are not always consistent for students when they move over from one grade to the next. An imaginative curriculum and good instructional practice engages students' interest and accelerates their learning. The whole staff team is committed to developing each child emotionally, socially and academically. The provision for special education students is good

Aspects of the school's life are strong, but whole school strategic planning, on a number of fronts, lacks focused evaluation tools to measure the impact of priorities for improvement on student outcomes. Some decisive actions have made a cutting edge difference to the quality of education and achievement for students. The mid-year narrative of student performance is very good and is used effectively to shape new learning goals for students. However, a number of initiatives are at too early a stage of development to evaluate their impact. Based on what has been achieved to date by a well led and dedicated staff the capacity for further improvement is good.

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 gathers a range of test and teacher assessment data to build a picture of each student. This data informs teachers about the ways in which students learn alongside the progress they make. As a Design Your Own assessment school, it has made a good start in developing periodic assessments for English language arts and mathematics, but it is too early to evaluate their impact. Detailed teacher observations and annotations enable the school to monitor the progress of each student over time. Mid-year narratives inform parents of the progress their children have made towards their learning goals, and are used by the principal to evaluate how well students are doing class by class.

Good data is gathered about the performance of English language learners and special education students, and is used effectively. For instance, a special educational needs student, identified as having good observation skills, was allowed to visit other classes to

engage in activities which accelerated his learning. This enabled him to achieve his potential and do well in the City tests. Data on the performance of ethnic groups is not gathered. The school's development of data to provide an understanding of its performance in other categories of interest is ad hoc and limited. The school does not measure its performance against other small progressive schools or against the comparison of how different ethnic groups progress throughout the school. However, performance and progress measured on the comparison of individual students, classes, grades and academic subjects is robust. It does look at its performance in the City tests and this has triggered actions, such as provision of a mathematics coach to ensure greater consistency in mathematics instruction and assessment.

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 principal meets frequently with grade and subject cohort teachers and across groups to discuss student's next learning steps. Discussion in these meetings is robust. As a result of direct observation of teaching, immediate changes to teaching practice have been agreed, in order to accelerate learning for specific individuals. Long-term strategic planning to achieve whole school goals is less well developed, except for the implementation and evaluation of the Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) class. Goals and plans for individual students and classes are shaped and assessed daily. For example, the Collaborative Team Teaching class became fascinated by the Fibonacci number sequence they discovered through a class reading activity. They decided with their teachers that they wanted to conduct a science experiment to test it. Their interest was followed through in an exciting science and mathematics investigation. There is a sharp focus on raising standards in mathematics, but a specific measurable goal, such as a percentage increase in the number of students to reach levels three and four in the City mathematics test, has not been set. Goals and plans that focus on the school as a whole are not well developed.

The attention given to the development of special education students is good. Based on reading assessments, they are given targeted pull-out support by a reading teacher and they make good progress. The 'circle time' activity in the Collaborative Team Teaching class builds students' confidence and improves their communication skills. The systems to involve parents and students in setting learning goals are proficient. This creates a model where the school and parents can work in partnership to accelerate the learning for their children. However, a few parents remain unclear about the learning goals for their children. The activity of all members of the school community and its partners is driven by goals to improve student performance. There is a commitment to the development of the whole child, both emotionally and academically.

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 developed an imaginative and innovative curriculum based on data about students learning styles. Thematic in structure, it generates meaningful interim data to

measure students' engagement and enjoyment and provides useful information to inform improvements to accelerate learning. The emphasis on the arts makes a valuable contribution to students' emotional development.

Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. A valuable one-to-one scheduled meeting between each teacher and the principal is manageable because the school is small. The meeting focuses on individual students and their learning styles. Teachers are adept at tailoring activities matched to students' needs based on a range of authentic data about student performance in their classes.

Budget and staffing decisions are based on data about students needs. For example, analysis of the 2006 City mathematics test results led to the funding of a mathematics coach to work with class teachers, to facilitate continuity in instructional practice in the subject across the school. To raise achievement in reading and to develop a love for books, a specialist reading teacher is employed to work with small groups of students in a pull-out model. Scheduling based on student data is good and enables staff teams to meet to discuss and explore ways of raising achievement for individuals, groups of students and subjects.

Instructional programs actively engage students in enquiry, investigation and problem solving. They are differentiated and planned flexibly to meet individual student needs. Students enjoy learning, love coming to school, and behave well. There is a strong focus on their social and emotional development. Students say, 'We enjoy our lessons and feel safe at school'. They have a trusted adult they can turn to with any difficulties they may have. Patterns of attendance are analyzed and robust procedures are in place to intervene where any concerns arise.

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.

Staff are selected on their understanding of how students learn in a progressive school and their capacity to use authentic data. At interview they are given data about an imaginary problem and asked to explain what they would do to manage change. Professional development focuses on students' needs and time is made available for it. Professional development focused on the Collaborative Team Teaching model has had a marked impact on raising the achievement of some of the most vulnerable students in the school. Currently there is a focus on developing periodic assessments in mathematics, suitable for use with the whole school's student population.

The principal frequently observes lessons and gives feedback to teachers. Her feedback is carefully structured to lead to an improvement in students learning. There is a well established peer review model and teachers share good practice by visiting each others' classes and learning valuable tips from each other to improve their instructional practice. The principal is respected by all stakeholders in the school's community. Good routines ensure that the school runs smoothly, although a few parents express concern over communication about day-to-day issues.

There are a range of collaborative planning meetings which are scheduled regularly. Teachers, the guidance counselor and paraprofessionals get together and revise their curriculum plans and instructional activities, and set new learning goals for students in their

classes. For instance, a focused meeting between the grade 3 teachers and the principal resulted in decisive actions to improve the quality of education for particular students in that grade. Partnerships with outside agencies, to support students in reaching their academic goals, are effective. Their problem-solving skills are honed through activities organized through the 'Math in the City Project' and the New York Restoration Project is used well to raise their achievement in science.

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.

Systems for evaluating individual student's academic progress and emotional development throughout the year are good. However, not all school plans include frequent interim goals and effective success criteria to measure outcomes for students. The Comprehensive Education Plan focuses on important priorities for improvement, but its evaluative tools to measure the success of initiatives being launched do not link sufficiently to outcomes for students. No comparison is made against how the school is doing against similar progressive schools in the City. The school is not yet able to evaluate the impact of certain important assessment tools to facilitate consistency of assessment across classes, for example in mathematics, because these tools are still at an emergent stage of development.

Strategic planning, to build confidence and raise achievement in reading for students who experience the most barriers to learning, is good. Interim goals are set for students with special education needs and analysis of performance data is used to further refine the strategies used. Analysis of final outcomes in the 2006 City mathematics tests have driven the school's planning to raise achievement, but it is too early to measure the impact of actions taken. It is a very flexible school and has the courage to change direction mid course where data shows that its strategy may not be as successful as intended. For example, its homework policy has been revised to ensure equality of opportunity for students in completing their homework assignments. Provision is now made for students to complete their homework in an after school club.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Muscota New School (PS 314)	∅	✓	+
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	