



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Manhattan Middle School of Scientific Inquiry

Middle School 328

**401 West 164th Street
Manhattan
NY 10032**

Principal: Jorge Estrella

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Reviewer: Alan Geller

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry serves 596 students. It shares space in the building with another middle school, causing some overcrowding. Most classes have thirty or more students. This is a grade 6 through 8 school which was opened by the current principal in September of 2004. The majority of the students, 87%, are Hispanic, while the remainder, 12%, are Black. There are 267 English language learners which is a little less than 50% of the school population. These students receive a variety of programs to meet their needs. There are three bilingual special education classes that receive the same school program. The proportion of students recently arrived in the country is above that of similar schools and broadly in line with that of City schools. The majority of these students are from the Dominican Republic. The attendance rate, at 94% in 2005, was above that of both similar and City schools.

The school partners with a variety of community-based organizations and academic and cultural institutions which support students and parents.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school gathers and uses its own data as well as data from external tests, to identify programs to meet the needs of all students.
- Specialist teams, such as the pupil personnel team and academic intervention team, intervene effectively with at-risk students.
- The school leaders collaborate often with teachers to provide professional development and to plan improvements in the instructional program.
- All staff are encouraged to take a school-wide role in instructional and organizational leadership.
- The flexible school schedule encourages teachers to support each other and develop creative programming which is well matched to the needs of students.
- School-wide budgeting supports students by funding professional training for teachers as well as providing after-school programs.
- The principal is respected by all school constituents.
- Staff and students feel well supported due to the open door policy of the principal and the accessibility of staff to students.
- Staff have common planning time to meet weekly in both grade and subject area teams to plan and revise curriculum goals.
- The school supports continuous learning for all staff through professional meetings and summer institute training prior to each school year.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to focus on professional development and intervention activities to improve the teaching of reading.
- Celebrate student progress with displays of challenging student work.
- Seek additional opportunities to differentiate instruction for all students.
- Use teacher/student conferences to monitor the selection of leveled reading materials.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school.

The school has made a good start in its two years in existence. The vision of the principal has resulted in a culture of continuous learning for all, a strong focus on the use of data to inform instruction and a concern for developing the whole student. High expectations are communicated to staff, students and parents. The principal encourages the staff to take the lead in providing professional development and improving instruction. He has expertise in technology and enjoys gathering data and sharing it with the staff.

City test results, as well as school-based data, are used well at department and grade meetings to evaluate performance and inform planning. Additional ways to assess students are currently being developed, such as uniform midyear exams. There are many opportunities for the staff to meet to discuss data and to revise and improve teaching strategies. Teachers observe each other teaching and offer constructive suggestions. Outside consultants and trainers provide well-focused training to staff to develop their competencies in all subject areas. Although the school has not fully developed all of its plans, it is aware of next steps.

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.

Internal accountability measures such as running records, pre-assessments in reading and mathematics, school tests, City-wide interim assessments, learning walks and portfolios, all serve to provide the staff with a wide-angle view of their students over time. All staff receive training in the understanding of the varied uses of data in planning the instructional program. The principal expects that teachers maintain extensive records concerning the progress of students and classes. He has guaranteed that all staff will have full access to all online data. At present, steps are being taken to refine records through the development of common midyear assessments.

The school has developed teams to make informed decisions about students and to ensure that they receive the support needed, both academically and emotionally. The teams look at students regularly to track any potential problems and to identify students for additional interventions both during and after school. The leadership team works collaboratively with these teams and with all staff to guarantee that every student is properly served.

Data is reviewed at grade level meetings and at subject area meetings. The school reviews data concerning English language learners and special education students. The school effectively tracks the progress of these students as well as the students who are most at risk. Teachers note student progress and assignments are made so that extra help is coordinated carefully. Coaches and lead teachers use this data to guide their professional development plans.

As a result of careful analysis of the English language arts data, the cabinet has identified the need to improve instruction and has taken steps to provide focused professional development sessions. It is also piloting a new program for bilingual students and has established four different classroom approaches to improve student progress.

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

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

The school started the goal-setting process by engaging all staff in a summer institute prior to the beginning of the school year. Formalized structures were then developed to encourage collaboration between teachers and administration to develop curriculum and assessments. A common planning time exists for all staff to meet on a weekly basis to plan the school program, to track student progress and to adjust plans as necessary. A subject meeting is also held weekly in which teachers can plan for the delivery of instruction. A primary goal of these sessions is to improve the curriculum and instruction with a focus on developing lessons that will engage all students in an inquiry approach. These meetings are often lead by an administrator or coach, who devise an agenda and provide follow up in order to guarantee that all plans are carefully implemented. The information developed is shared with all school-wide organizational teams who reflect further on the plans and provide additional support where it is most required.

Particular attention is given to students who are most at risk. Well-targeted programs, carefully selected materials and smaller classes have been established to support these students. Intervention plans are developed by the academic intervention team who look carefully at student problems, systematically establish suitably challenging academic goals and track the progress towards them. Specialists provide one-on-one conferencing to those students identified as having a particular social need that may interfere with learning.

The school has a culture of learning and reflection with teachers continually seeking to improve instructional practices to reach goals. There are high expectations of both staff and students. Parents are made fully aware of the school’s goals and have open access to school personnel. They are involved in decision-making and are kept regularly updated regarding their students’ progress through report cards and parent/teacher meetings. Students themselves are aware of the aspirations that the school has for them and are eager to do well. The school community often works together to formulate goals during, for example, the compilation of the Comprehensive Education Plan.

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.

The school has selected curriculum plans that are well-aligned to the mandated requirements and the needs of the students. There is a strong focus on developing the basic skills of literacy and mathematics. Regular opportunities are provided to assess the progress of students and to enable programs to be adjusted if there is a need to do so. As

the overall program is developing, evaluations to date have resulted in additional steps to improve the curriculum. Data is used well to ensure that all students, including English language learners and special education students, receive additional support in at least one program. Teachers are aware of their accountability for the progress of the students in their care. They often utilize lessons based upon an inquiry model so that classes are motivating. Data is used regularly to plan lessons and differentiate instruction. Practice in this regard is variable, however. Tasks set or resources deployed are not always fully suited to the needs of some of the students in the class. The school has recognized the need to monitor the selection of guided reading books more systematically, for example. Where additional support is provided outside of the classroom, programs and materials are carefully selected.

The school is effective in ensuring that budgeting and scheduling are based on student needs. The budget, for example, has been judiciously used to employ additional teachers for small group instruction, bring in outside consultants to act as mentors and to provide training for staff in the use of school programs. Resources to support instruction are also made readily available for all staff.

The principal, who has an open-door policy, and the staff show great respect for the students. This creates a culture where students feel valued and are expected to learn. Students feel challenged and know that they can receive both academic and personal support from staff whenever they need it. Students are also involved in learning walks, which serve to enhance their knowledge of the school's best practices and raise their overall awareness of school programs. Student attendance is maintained at a high level because the students are motivated to learn and feel that they do not want to miss anything new. The teachers regularly communicate with parents when a student is absent. The principal and his attendance team monitor absentees rigorously and a home visit is made when necessary.

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 school employs a rigorous selection process, including interviews and demonstration lessons, which has accounted for the quality staff that are now in place. The school expects candidates to possess an understanding of middle school students, data and a willingness to be a part of a collaborative team. This has worked well.

Professional development decisions are based primarily upon the needs of the students and secondly on the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching staff. The cabinet has a systematic approach to developing protocols for improving instruction and the team use learning walks regularly to evaluate the quality of teacher planning and performance. Well-focused training is provided by the principal, assistant principals and the coaches. Lead teachers and experienced staff are expected to provide regular workshops and demonstration lessons so that best practice can be shared. Other teachers also provide demonstration lessons and are observed by their colleagues. Subsequent peer-evaluation provides good opportunities for feedback and development. In addition, outside consultants are utilized well to focus on particular aspects of mathematics and English language arts that are in need of improvement. There has been a particular focus on developing writing skills, for example. Weekly meetings provide regular opportunities for teachers and administrators to note the areas that are working well and those that require

further development. The school recognizes the need to continue its focus on further developing the teaching of reading. A review of other subject areas is now in process. There is a focus on strengthening the inquiry method in science, for example.

The principal is well respected and serves as a positive role model for students, parents, teachers and administrators. As a result, decisions are realized quickly and successfully. He is the driving force behind all changes in the school.

The school has effective partnerships that provides after school activities for enrichment, intervention, sports and computer construction. A Saturday Academy is also in place. The needs of students are well met in these supplementary programs.

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 internal accountability measures for monitoring school plans are developing well but procedures are not yet fully established. Progress towards interim goals, such as those in reading and mathematics, are tracked carefully by teachers. Portfolios, mathematics journals, running records and tests are also used to monitor progress although specific timeframes for this process are not yet formally established. Teachers regularly review students' work in meetings in order to agree on the quality of the work and establish a shared understanding of standards. Common scheduling enables teachers to review the success of instructional programs and review suggestions for improvement. The principal and his cabinet are focused daily on the data and review these regularly to note progress and suggest adjustments where appropriate. Periodic assessments are available to all staff and are used systemically to plan lessons and additional assessments.

Each plan is evaluated and the structures of the school allow for changes to be made. The school takes an objective look at students by viewing the quality of their work, looking at referrals to the dean, and noting participation in after-school programs in addition to scrutiny of assessment scores. Team and grade goals are reviewed regularly during professional development sessions and self- and peer-evaluation. Changes to the curriculum are well accepted and quickly become a part of the school program.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Manhattan Middle School of Scientific Inquiry (MS 328)	∅	✓	+
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