



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Louis Armstrong Middle School

Public School 227

**32-02 Junction Boulevard
Queens
NY 11369**

Principal: Renee David

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Reviewer: Keith Edwards

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Louis Armstrong Middle School takes students from grade 5 through grade 8. The students are admitted through an application process and there are currently 1467 students enrolled. Almost all of the students are bussed into school each day from throughout the District and beyond. The school population is very stable both in terms of the students and the staff.

The school is home to a very culturally diverse population. The Hispanic students are the majority group and make up 33% of the school population. The remaining student population is made up of 30% White, 18% Asian, 17% Black and 2% American Indian students. Approximately two per cent of the students are English language learners. 6% of the school's population are special education students with a wide range of learning and physical disabilities represented. Both proportions are lower than in similar and City schools. Almost 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch and so the school does not receive Title 1 funding. In the last academic year, attendance levels were 95% and above similar schools and the City average. The school has a low incidence of suspensions.

The school building is currently undergoing a massive program of reconstruction. There is adequate space on the four floors for the current number of students. The school is divided into three houses with an assistant principal and guidance counselor for each house.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The needs of each and every student are at the heart of the school's work.
- The principal and her senior staff provide outstanding leadership and have successfully developed teams that are fully accountable and that support the process of school improvement.
- Through her drive, high expectations and rigor, the principal has developed the necessary structures to sustain school improvement.
- Data on the students' performance is used very well in decision making at all levels to guide improvement and to inform the school's goals.
- The staff use their thorough understanding of each student's personal, social and emotional circumstances when planning for their academic needs and so help them to overcome obstacles to learning.
- This is an inclusive school, where the curriculum is carefully designed to enable all students, regardless of their academic, social or ethnic background, to achieve.
- The school runs a comprehensive support program that enables the students to succeed.
- The students are highly motivated and thoroughly enjoy their time at school.
- The school provides a secure environment and student behavior is very good.
- The school has developed a very effective working partnership with the parents and they are very appreciative of the work of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop fully its program of professional development to closely match the shared goals of its Comprehensive Education Plan.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The Louis Armstrong Middle School is an excellent school that has the welfare and academic development of its students at the heart of its work. High expectations of every student inform all of the planning and organization of the school. The principal and her dedicated team have established a climate in school where the students feel safe and secure and are enabled to flourish. Through their careful nurturing, this well-established team has ensured that all students are valued and respected. This has boosted the students' self-awareness and self-esteem and provides an excellent foundation for high achievement. The students respond very well to the climate for learning and are highly motivated to achieve their best. The use of data, together with the strength of the relationships within school, is key to the school's success. The principal and her senior colleagues have a deep understanding of each member of the school community. They know their strengths and areas of weakness. They take the trouble to work out how to get the best out of each member of staff and how to enable each student to succeed. The school is also persistent and will pursue different strategies to engage students who may become disaffected. They also understand how to challenge those students who are drawing to the close of their school careers and to prepare them fully for college.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

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

The school has very effective systems for collecting data of all kinds relating to the performance and progress of students. From the outset in grade 5, tests are administered to gauge the students starting points and potential. This information is used successfully to ensure that each class has a spread of ability and also to inform other grouping arrangements, particularly in English, language arts classes and mathematics.

The school monitors very carefully the progress of different groups of students. They compare student progress by subject, by class, by grade and by house to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is equally effective for all students. This information, which is discussed at regular departmental and cabinet meetings, is used to identify students at risk of falling behind and those who, with extra support and challenge, could increase their scores and move up a level. Senior staff monitor and analyze overall performance to track the attainment of all student groups. In particular, English language learners are monitored carefully to ensure that they are achieving as well as they might.

The school is competitive. The principal and her colleagues are mindful of the school's standing against other schools and are constantly looking for areas where improvements

can be made. Variations in performance between subjects are analyzed, particularly in mathematics and science, to ensure that the students are achieving as well as they might. The principal, with her background in mathematics, has a clear understanding of the uses of statistical data and this expertise has been used effectively to sharpen her colleagues' understanding and to inform much of the decision making in school.

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.

Decisions are made in a collaborative effort with staff and parents. Data is used very effectively to plan and set goals for immediate and long-term improvement. Goals are clearly set out in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The school uses a regular program of retreats to focus on particular issues and to determine policy and goals. These are then transformed into action plans which detail who needs to do what and by when, and include indicators so that the school knows when it has been successful and why.

Teachers set goals for individual and groups of students who need support to move up a level. All teachers have a detailed knowledge of and share with students the skills they require to succeed in their assignments. Through regular discussions with individual students, teachers share goals and give feedback to boost their performance. The students take part in peer editing to enable them to appreciate the strengths and areas for improvement in each other's work and to develop their own expertise in critical analysis.

Remedial action is taken when necessary to support those students who are having difficulty at any stage of their academic development. The special educational needs students have well defined individual education plans which are monitored carefully to ensure that their learning is broken down into measurable steps. The assistant principal responsible ensures that their progress is reviewed at very regular intervals and the appropriate intervention strategies put into place.

The relationship with parents is good. The school regards parents as essential partners in their children's education and works hard to involve them. The school provides excellent information about the organization of the school, what is taught, and how the children can be supported at home. Parents speak highly of the quality of communication between home and school. High expectations are conveyed at every opportunity. Successes and achievements are widely celebrated to consistently raise expectations.

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's curriculum is securely based on high expectations of students and the regular review of their progress. Assessment information is used very effectively to determine programs of work and intervention strategies to supplement the core curriculum to ensure that the students maintain good progress. Through their regular departmental meetings,

the teachers determine the most appropriate curriculum for their students and they are willing to learn from each other. This is particularly evident in subjects such as science where the selection of the curriculum has led to high achievement in State tests each year.

Teachers' skilful use of data alongside their excellent understanding of the students' social and emotional circumstances helps to provide the most appropriate learning context and raise the achievement of every student. This is consistent throughout the houses and throughout the range of subjects that are taught. In science, the students are challenged through an open-ended approach to investigations and in social studies computers are used to great effect to enable all students to succeed. Teachers use a range of strategies and grouping arrangements to ensure that the students are motivated and interested. Students fully appreciate opportunities to learn through debate, drama, practical work and the use of computers alongside direct instruction. The students have positive attitudes towards learning. They apply themselves in lessons and behave extremely well throughout the day. Students are very supportive of each other and appreciate the opportunity to contribute to school development decisions through the work of house councils. They take their role seriously, using their voice to improve the facilities and to support the needs of others beyond the school community.

The teachers are held accountable for their students' progress through regular analysis of data and the monitoring of their work. Teachers are very aware of their students' achievement, and instruction is nearly always differentiated well. Isolated examples of insufficient differentiation are picked up promptly and improvements put into place. Potentially higher achieving students are identified early and given work that enables them to achieve their potential. Advanced classes in mathematics, science, French and Spanish provide students with opportunities to gain high school credit whilst still in middle school.

The analysis and use of data is central to decision making in the school. Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are all firmly based on documented student needs. The principal is shrewd in her use of budget, particularly in terms of securing the services of key staff to raise achievement. The school is very creative in its scheduling arrangements so that students can benefit from working in different groupings depending on their needs.

Attendance levels are well above the City average because the students do not want to miss school and because of the very effective arrangements to promote good attendance. Punctuality is good because most students come to school by bus.

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 stability is excellent. The principal is very supportive of her staff and has established an excellent management structure that values the individual professional attributes of her colleagues. All staff are held to account, but they are also trusted to exercise their professional judgment on a day-to-day basis. This is particularly evident in the work of the assistant principal who has the responsibility for the welfare and academic achievement of special education students. The principal is mindful that only high caliber staff or recently qualified staff with excellent potential are appointed. She has an excellent understanding of the strengths of her staff and uses this to great effect when making appointment or

deployment decisions. She is determined that the vacant position and key post of English language arts coach will only be filled by an outstanding candidate.

Initiatives abound and all staff are eager to develop their skills and effectiveness. Much professional development is school based, but extensive use is also made of external providers. There is a program of regular classroom monitoring to evaluate instructional effectiveness and regular staff discussions to evaluate the outcomes and implications of such observations. The school makes extensive use of paraprofessionals to support the work in class and their contribution is evaluated fully. The school recognizes that there could be greater alignment between the professional development program and the priorities in the Comprehensive Education Plan.

There are regular departmental and grade meetings where assessment data is scrutinized and the progress of groups and individual students is discussed openly. Team discussions are challenging yet supportive and focus extensively both on learning styles and the use of assessment data to guide and plan instruction. Consequently, these meetings provide forums for planning interventions and revising support programs. Teachers engage in study and discussion groups to share best practices and support one another.

The school is very welcoming to students, parents and visitors and runs very well. The principal and senior colleagues are highly respected for their professional expertise and provide models, not only of their high expectations, but also for the depth of their humanity in their dealings with the students and their families.

Extensive partnerships give very good support to the school in meeting its goals. Support provided by outside agencies help special education students to make good progress. Project Arts funding and the Louis Armstrong fund increase fine and visual arts programs and strong partnerships with local colleges provide additional support to learning.

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 school has a long term strategy for continuing school improvement. The current Comprehensive Education Plan is very clear in its priorities and is very firmly anchored to statistical data. Progress towards achieving goals is discussed in various meetings with a range of staff including the monthly school leadership team and department meetings, and weekly instructional cabinet meetings. Data is discussed, studied, and analyzed by teachers during common planning periods, at team and department conferences, and at faculty conferences throughout the school year to discuss progress towards meeting the goals. Inbuilt flexibility to school development planning ensures that timely and speedy adjustments can be made when new information becomes available. Yearly goals are reviewed quarterly and revised as needed. Information from interim assessments and progress reports are used to evaluate students' progress throughout the year and to adapt plans and practices as necessary. Pupil personnel team constantly updates information at its monthly meeting to monitor intervention plans and the services by providers. Math and literacy teachers attend weekly grade meetings to discuss instruction and make realignments to practices as required. Secure systems enable the school to set annual goals that build effectively on the previous year's monitoring and evaluation outcomes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Louis Armstrong Middle School (PS 277)	∅	✓	+
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