



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Magnet School of Applied Arts and Science

Middle School 254

**2452 Washington Avenue
Bronx
NY 10458**

Principal: Wilford Hemans

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Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Magnet School of Applied Science and Arts is small in size, serving the needs of 557 students from grades six through eight. It is divided into three academies each led by an assistant principal. The school is comprised of 69.5% Hispanic students which is higher than city averages, 21.9% Black students, 6.3% Asian students and 2.3% White students. Currently 30.5% of students are English language learners whose main language is Spanish. This is much higher than similar schools or City schools. Ten percent of the students are special education students.

The school has Title 1 funding for 98% of students. The school places great emphasis on good attendance. At 91.2 % this is higher than that of similar schools and equivalent to the City average.

This Magnet School celebrates its success in science and is working hard to put all aspects of its mission statement into practice where the school provides a project based education which inspires a desire for lifelong learning.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The small size of the school and the cultural diversity of the staff create a family atmosphere where students are respected and supported, academically and socially.
- Different communication systems effectively inform parents and caregivers of activities, test dates and student progress.
- The After School Corporation (TASC) works in partnership with the school to support academic and recreational goals.
- Attendance has high priority, absence triggers immediate intervention resulting in attendance levels being above those of similar schools.
- The principal has an open door policy and effectively supports staff, parents, caregivers and students.
- The school successfully secures additional funding to further support students' learning.
- The cabinet works collaboratively and supports teachers to refine instruction and understand student progress.
- The school clearly defines the complementary roles of the assistant principals, co-coordinators and coaches, creating a smooth running organization.
- Additional strategies and focused interventions are continually looked for in each curriculum area to further support student progress.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop a clear understanding of the analysis and use of data to inform and further differentiate instruction.
- Use all available data to understand and increase the progress of categories of interest to the school especially the differences in progress between males and females and the Black and Hispanic students.
- Establish a timeframe and provide training to enable all departments to be as proficient at planning and setting measurable goals as the best.
- Re-evaluate all plans and record all meeting outcomes in order to measure if stated goals have been reached.
- Further share good practice and provide training to raise the level of instruction of some teachers.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Magnet School of Applied Arts and Science is a small school whose goal is to improve student learning through the use of the 'Principles of Learning'. These are clear expectations, accountable talk, and academic rigor in a thinking curriculum. The Principal is highly respected and works very closely with the assistant principals, setting high expectations and always looking for creative ways to support students. As a result student progress is improving in all core subjects.

The curriculum is broad and is enhanced by the teaching of earth science, history alive and digital journalism. The After School Corporation (TASC) compliments the extended day and focuses on literacy, math, social studies and science as well as recreational activities which motivate students. In addition Saturday academies provide academic support for core subjects and morning soccer and basketball aid attendance improvement and reduce dropout. Aikido classes are held every Saturday and have an emphasis on good behavior and this has a positive impact on behavior in school.

Good systems are in place to gather and examine data and the progress of students is tracked effectively at an individual level. There is some very good instruction and most teachers are self reflective but there is significant variation in the quality of instruction. The administration is working very hard to ensure a greater consistency of practice. Students are well cared for and supported and the large number of English language learners benefit from the additional support they receive.

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

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has created good systems for data management. It places great importance on understanding the performance of each student. Before each new academic year, the principal emails all staff with data on student performance. This is interrogated and targets are set in each subject area. The data is accessed on line and regularly updated. This provides detailed information which allows the movement of students between classes in order to best support their needs. The assistant principals have subject specific as well as grade level responsibilities and meet with their teams weekly. It is then that the performance and progress of each student is carefully tracked at student, classroom, subject and grade level. In addition, the assistant principals have the responsibility for monitoring the performance of special education students. They have established appropriate targets for improvement for each student and have good systems for checking the success of the academic interventions. The school is aware of the differences in performance of males and females and Black and Hispanic students. As yet the data is not used to make specific comparisons or to understand why these differences occur and what strategies might be employed to accelerate these students' learning.

The school has a part time bi-lingual co-coordinator who works closely with an assistant principal to regularly monitor the progress of English language learners. Additionally the co-coordinator works closely with teachers to implement ways of improving teaching strategies and provides valuable support for bilingual and English as a second language, teachers.

The school is part of a middle school network. The schools visit each other and constantly reflect on each other's progress. This sharing of practice has helped the school to improve its results over the last three years. These are now above similar schools at eighth grade in English Language Arts and mathematics and well above in science.

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.

The school uses many data sources to understand individual student performance within grades and subject areas. At the beginning of the academic year the principal works with the cabinet to set instructional goals for the year. Teachers then work together collaboratively, aided by the assistant principals. At weekly grade and subject specific meetings data is scrutinized and goals are established. This is done particularly effectively within the mathematics department and the good practice is beginning to be shared. The goals and plans focus on the progress of each student and the students with the greatest need. In order to raise achievements, vacation programs are also held. The school sees these, as well as the extended day, as a valuable extension to the normal teaching time.

In most classrooms high expectations are conveyed to students and they understand how to improve their performance. In the best lessons students are proud of their work, talk eagerly about their achievements and feel well supported by their teachers. Information on student performance is regularly shared with parents and the principal operates an open door policy and is always eager to give support. Saturday morning meetings are also held to help parents support their students' learning. The school places great importance on communicating with parents. Phone Master is used to inform parents of forthcoming events and tests, and can be accessed by all parents in the appropriate language. Monthly calendars are sent to all parents which are of high quality and add to the formal reporting system. Parents speak very positively about the support and communication they receive.

Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activities of most members of the school community. The administration is well aware where this is weaker and gives support and professional development opportunities to work towards greater consistency of practice.

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 coaches and administration adapt and complement the mandated curriculum using data to inform their decisions. They see this as one way of making the school’s mission statement become a reality. Additional academic programs provide breadth and depth for students.

Teachers are keen to provide learning opportunities that lead to raised achievements but planning for differentiation of instruction is currently very variable across the school. This deficiency is recognized as a key area for professional development. The school is at an early stage in its assessment of different student learning styles but is aware that sharply focused lesson plans need to be in place to improve progress.

Based on the analysis of data, budgeting decisions are made to meet curricular requirements. For example the mathematics consultant is funded for thirty days to support the department, facilitate meetings and plans with the coaches to model lessons. Math techniques are closely looked at and students say that ‘mathematics is fun’ and their progress is improving. It is the school’s intention to widen this approach to look more closely at the needs of other student groups. The comprehensive education plan seeks to improve the overall instructional program and staff selection takes account of the diverse cultural needs of the student population.

The majority of students is engaged in learning and enjoy coming to school. They speak positively about lessons, particularly when they are active and involved in group work. When teacher expectations are not high enough and there is little differentiation students are less engaged. Attendance at the school is good and the positive strategies to support non-attendance, such as early morning soccer and basketball classes have a positive impact.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Staff are selected on the basis of their ability to relate to middle school students. They are asked to resolve different scenarios that are appropriate to the school, are observed teaching and are assessed on how well their instruction relates to the students’ needs.

Professional development decisions are decided by the departments, led by the assistant principals and are linked to student data. For example in mathematics the department looked collectively at strategies that would help students effectively solve multiple choice questions as this was identified as a common weakness. Agendas for departmental meetings are always circulated but outcomes and actions are not always recorded.

The assistant principals observe lessons within their particular departments and the principal has responsibility for all aspects of science. Informal observations and learning walks also help the administration understand the effectiveness of professional development and they are very aware of teachers’ strengths and areas for further growth.

The principal views all of the cabinet as learners and has identified his own professional development needs aligned to those of the school.

All subject areas are aiming towards a greater consistency of practice. At the weekly subject specific and grade meetings plans are evaluated and revised. In the most effective partnerships, teachers evaluate themselves and each other, observe each other's practice and learn from the model lessons. Laboratory sites are being established that exemplify components of a balanced department. Inter-class and intra-school visitations are being organized among literacy teachers in order to raise achievement.

The principal is well respected by staff, students and parents. He has a calm and reflective manner, is very visible around the school and is committed to improving the learning experience of all students. The school runs smoothly and procedures are generally followed. The school works very closely with community partners particularly The After School Corporation (TASC) and Attendance Improvement Drop out Prevention (ACDP) who offer academic, socio-economic and recreational support to students. All partnerships support students effectively to make progress and to achieve academic goals. The school successfully applies for grants to support student learning, including a library grant, a professional development grant and the acquisition of home computers for sixth grade students.

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 small size of the school allows teachers to know students well and facilitates the opportunities for useful informal discussions on student progress. These are complemented with the faculty, grade, subject, cabinet and administration meetings. The administration is working hard to ensure consistency of practice in all meetings where plans and success criteria in all areas are consistently evaluated to measure their impact.

Comparison of student progress within the bilingual classes and the special education classes is carried out effectively. Comparison of student progress across other classes is developing and teachers are now more accountable for improving instruction. The school intends to further share its good practice so that all teachers set challenging goals and realign practices to improve student academic outcomes

The senior leadership team meets regularly to monitor the progress towards the goals in the comprehensive education plan with a view to improving the overall instructional program. Monitoring and tailoring instruction for goal achievement is a school priority. School goals do not yet include measurable interim stages to aid the specific evaluation of the progress of improvement plans.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Magnet School of Applied Arts and Science (MS254)	∅	✓	+
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	