



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Middle School of the Arts  
790 East New York Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: Susan Hobson-Ransom**

**Dates of review: May 29 - 30, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Mary Crampsie**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Middle School of the Arts is a middle school with 400 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 92% Black, 6.3% Hispanic, 0.3% American Indian, 0.3% Asian and 1.3% White students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 85.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 98% eligibility.

The Middle School of the Arts is in its fourth year, and was created from the phase-out of an intermediate school. The school is on a shared site and its facilities include a computer suite, library and auditorium.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and faculty are committed to a vision of the school as a center for the arts in which all students can find ways to express themselves and excel.
- The administration and faculty keep parents informed about the goals set for each student and convey consistently good expectations.
- The school provides a broad and engaging curriculum, incorporating the arts, to enhance learning within and outside of the school.
- The administration and faculty work hard to create a secure learning environment.
- There is an environment of mutual trust and respect between staff and students, which underpins personal and academic development.
- A range of services including youth development, guidance and other services, support students' academic, personal and social growth.
- The school has developed some supportive partnerships with outside entities for the academic and personal growth of students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Utilize data more effectively to provide a continual, rigorous understanding of how all students are performing and progressing.
- Gather and present data so that it is easily understood and communicates core messages to the wider school community.
- Ensure that teachers use school, classroom and student data consistently to plan for and provide differentiated instruction.
- Build on strategies to encourage an open and reflective professional environment.
- Ensure precision in all goal setting across the school and that rubrics and frameworks consistently support students in lessons.
- Compare the school's performance and progress with similar schools.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

### **Overall Evaluation**

#### **This school is undeveloped with proficient features.**

The principal of the Middle School of the Arts has a vision for the school as a center for the performing arts. She believes that every child has a talent, which the school will discover, foster and encourage them to understand the wide variety of careers associated with the arts. Until this year, the school admitted its students based on their interest in, and aptitude for, the arts. Grade 8 students choose an aspect of the arts to follow, which the curriculum supports. Rewards for honors students include opportunities to visit Broadway to help them realize that scenery, costume and design play an important part alongside the performing arts.

The school has made a slow start in using data to drive instruction. It currently does not organize data so that the administration understands key messages. The principal accepts she needs to find ways to build capacity and leadership amongst her staff. The school has a broad understanding of trends but does not fully utilize data to provide an objective and constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom and grade. This is also true of groups of interest to the school. To advocate for the use of data in planning and setting goals in order to accelerate student's learning, the principal has recently employed a part-time data specialist, and introduced professional development for staff. As a result of these measures, the school is making some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Goal setting and monitoring is not yet rigorous. The curriculum provides interim data about progress towards goals, but these are not sufficiently precise, measurable and time-related. Not all students are aware of the opportunities, including the arts, which are available. Resources are good. The administration works hard to address the tone of the school, through the dress code and instilling appropriate routines. This is an ongoing time-consuming process. Relationships between staff and students are generally good. Students and their parents believe teachers have high expectations, and that they know what they have to do to improve. Differentiation and leveling of students work is not yet consistent across the school. Teachers find the recent training on Acuity helpful. They are enthusiastic about online diagnostic tools, which provide assessments and suggested strategies.

The school's inquiry team is tracking the progress of at-risk students from the lowest achieving third of students. The intention is to extrapolate strategic messages relevant to a wider group of students, but data is not clearly recorded and tracked.

## **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 the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is undeveloped with proficient features.**

The principal has a broadly accurate view of the trends in student achievement. The school has improved achievement in English language arts and math by 3%. It has begun to gather and generate a wide range of data, using this to track progress. However, the data is not collated to provide the administration with an objective and constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom and grade level. Both the newly appointed data specialist and the principal are learning how best to use data.

The high number of special education students are mostly taught in general education classes, collaborative team teaching classes and self-contained classes. The school does not track these students sufficiently closely. It is also unclear about the progress of all sub-groups of interest, including gender and high-achieving students, as it does not interrogate relevant data in order to accelerate their learning.

The school measures performance and progress based on prior achievement. It does not make comparisons with similar schools, to identify and benefit from best practice. Training and management systems are beginning to support teachers in the use of school data, with Acuity proving a useful and popular tool for them. "RAMP-UP" and "Read-180" programs now target literacy.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is undeveloped with proficient features.**

The administration and inquiry team work well together. There are regular department and grade meetings, but collaborative processes are insufficiently rigorous. Staff relationships are good. The principal works very hard, but leadership capacity and delegation of responsibilities among staff is not adequately built to support her strategic decision-making and the staff's career development. The principal commented, "Sometimes I feel like I'm spinning my wheels."

The inquiry team is tracking a group of students identified as at-risk from an analysis of their achievement on arrival. However, their work lacks rigor and ongoing reference to data, with documentation unclear and outcomes not clearly recorded. The school effectively identifies at-risk students but is not yet effective in planning for improvements to support them. Individual education plans goals lack specificity, are not time related or reviewed regularly.

Motivational posters and other display, such as a college mortarboard and gown, reinforce good expectations. Students believe that their teachers want the best for them. They know their achievement Level and how to get to the next Level. Parents feel the

principal is doing a good job, that teachers keep them well informed and that they are welcomed in school. They believe the curriculum is good as it offers opportunities, such as singing in the choir or taking part in poetry week, to harness students' talents. Parents appreciate teachers' efforts, saying teachers would, "twist themselves on a pretzel to make sure they (students) get what they need."

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school's core curriculum provides meaningful data about progress towards goals. Teachers conference regularly with students, which is the main source of meaningful data regarding progress, supplemented by running records, tests and other information. The broad curriculum includes the arts, although students would like to see further arts and crafts opportunities to support the principal's vision.

The administration does hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of students in their charge. In most lessons, students are attentive and compliant, with some lessons interesting and compelling, such as the art class. Some teachers have good relationships with their students. In other classes, students are less motivated. Teaching is rarely differentiated and does not sufficiently challenge students or address their needs consistently.

The principal has made some good decisions regarding the building, staff and scheduling. The appointment of coaches for English language arts and math has improved achievement. The principal has invested in employing a librarian, improving the library and purchasing computers for the computer suite, to support student motivation and learning.

There is an environment of mutual trust and respect throughout the school. However, expressing concern at the high level of suspensions, some students would like a more positive behavior policy. These members of the school government also felt that the school could be cleaner, especially the toilets. Therefore, mechanisms to hear and act on the student voice are not secure. Suitable systems and procedures to address attendance and tardiness are in place to some positive effect as attendance is 89%, an improvement on last year.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school's work is undeveloped with proficient features.**

The administration uses rubrics in a variety of formats in formal and informal classroom observations. Differentiated instruction checklists and feedback sheets do not provide opportunities for quality feedback or professional supportive dialogue. The principal makes suitable professional development decisions to support the improvement goals of students and teachers. She has introduced common planning time, grade conferences

and meeting time for the behavior support and attendance teams. Teachers in need receive support, and particularly appreciate the work of the “America’s Choice” consultant. Recent initiatives, such as Acuity and Scantron, have begun to make a positive impact enabling teachers to quickly identify students who have not grasped a concept and provide appropriate remediation. Inter-visitation opportunities for are not sufficiently valuable. The school does not have a culture of professional learning, although procedures for the induction of new teachers are in place. The substitute teacher system in the school is less satisfactory, as work is set for the whole class at the beginning of the year and does not appear to take account of student need or progress.

Youth development, guidance and other student support services are effective. Students appreciate guidance, mentoring and counseling opportunities. Clear procedures keep the school running smoothly, although these are very demanding of the administration’s time. The high number of suspensions is a cause for concern and maintaining discipline is a constant challenge. The dress code plays an important part in keeping students safe from gang activity in the neighborhood. To improve the tone, the principal has introduced gender specific classes in leadership development and conflict resolution. A variety of outside entities suitably support the academic and personal growth of the students.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is undeveloped with proficient features.**

The school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals, which are not always objectively measurable and are often not time specific. The main goals for the school have been attending to tone and trying to foster a culture of high expectations. The previous Quality Review commented that the school had a long way to go to make the Comprehensive Education Plan “a relevant tool,” which remains the case. Goals such as improving academic rigor in literacy and math are displayed in the principal’s office. These are appropriate and occasionally specific, such as “raise achievement in math and literacy by 3%.” These goals were part of a useful planning tool, although intended only for the leadership team. This process lacks sufficient rigor, as outcomes are not always dated and it is not clear when objectives have been achieved. The wider school community does not sufficiently share in this cycle. Teacher development plans are not supported by common rubrics with specific, measurable, achievable realistic and timed goals, to establish a culture of professional discussion and learning.

Teachers use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to track progress. They try a range of strategies but are not sufficiently able to evaluate effectiveness. School leaders track outcomes and revise plans immediately to reach stated goals. When interim assessment revealed a dip in achievement, the principal brought in an external consultant whose work proved effective. Strategic decisions are modified, such as to further support after school arts, but the evidence base for doing so is unclear.

The principal has a strong vision for the direction of the school. Through the arts, she believes that every child can learn discipline, respect and tolerance.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Middle School of the Arts</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>		X			

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?		X			
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?		X			
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?		X			
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?		X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?		X			
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?	X				
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?		X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X			

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.**

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?		X			
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?		X			
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?		X			
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X			

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?		X			
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X			
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?			X		
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?			X		
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?		X			
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?			X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?		X			
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?		X			
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?			X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?		X			
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					
		X			

<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?		X			
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?		X			
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?		X			
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?		X			
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					
		X			

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>