



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Hudson River Middle School

Middle School 289

**201 Warren Street
New York
NY 10282**

Principal: Ellen Foote

Dates of review: May 13 - 14, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Charlene Jordan

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Hudson River Middle School 289 is a middle school with 294 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 14% Black, 14% Hispanic, 36% White, and 37% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 4% 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 97%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school shares a building with Public School 89 and the increasing enrollment of the elementary school is creating space issues for the middle school. The principals and staffs of both schools, however, are collegial and cooperative creating a positive tone in the building as a whole.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is well respected throughout the school community for her vision and her capacity to effect change and ongoing school improvement.
- The school gathers a wide range of useful data to move progress and performance of students through differentiation, targeted interventions, and opportunities for students to excel.
- Effective systems and partnerships support all students well in academic social and emotional growth, particularly those requiring additional assistance.
- The inquiry team's work is impacting on whole school curricular reform, including consistent expectations for content writing.
- The principal, program coordinator, and coaches provide targeted professional development aligned to school goals focused on improving instructional practice.
- Collaboration and teamwork are strengths of the school community with a strong collegiate approach among teachers.
- Data from "design your own" assessments and portfolios in math and English is used for planning effective interventions and academic enhancements.
- Students benefit from a broad and engaging curriculum that enhances learning during and after the school day.
- All members of the school community cite the positive school culture focused on high expectations and mutual respect as a major strength of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Engage the school community in establishing and monitoring specific goals for individuals as well as groups of students across grades, ethnicities, and gender.
- Expand "design your own" assessments to all content areas and establish clear, interim benchmarks and formalized procedures for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness.
- Develop systems for utilizing rich data from portfolios and "design your own assessments" to monitor progress of individual students over time, in all subjects.
- Use information gathered from data, and links with similar schools, to increase level 4 achievement in English language arts.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The principal, program coordinator, and staff of Hudson River Middle School have formed an effective professional learning community focused on providing a nurturing and rigorous academic environment. Student-centered project based learning is integral to the work in every content area and great care is taken to ensure that all students have access to appropriate academic, social, and emotional supports.

Since the last Quality Review, the school has implemented additional methods for gathering and reviewing data and has improved the effectiveness of interventions and resources in support of the needs of students on all ability levels. The work of the inquiry team has resulted in a specific focus on improving organization and conventions in writing. Effective formative assessments, introduced across grade and subject areas, are providing useful data on student learning. The “design your own” assessments, currently utilized only in English Language Arts and math, provide additional performance data. The school does not yet have formalized systems for monitoring the effectiveness of all data gathering methods to track student progress over time. Higher achieving students are not consistently challenged in English language arts to accelerate progress further. Ongoing professional development, with an emphasis on looking at student work, assists teachers with understanding how to use the information to improve instructional practice. Students do not have individual learning paths with specific goals in all areas.

The culture of high expectations and mutual respect is evident in all aspects of the school’s work, including the attention to meeting the needs of the whole child through the variety of support services available and the effective partnerships that enhance learning.

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 well developed.

The school utilizes a variety of data from standardized tests, formative assessments, and project-based learning to track the progress of students across grades, ethnicities, and gender. Strong diagnostic tools assist the school in understanding the specific strengths and learning needs of students. Students have access to academic interventions before, during, and after the school day and the school aligns support to the specific needs of students to encourage participation. A group of struggling Hispanic males now attends a homework center prior to reporting for sports practices in the late afternoon, and students who have after school responsibilities access daily morning support.

An experienced special education teacher, assisted by paraprofessionals and supported by the literacy staff developer, carefully monitors the performance and progress of special education students in the multi-graded self-contained class. This includes developing individual learning plans for each of the thirteen students in the class. Resource room students benefit from a push-in and pullout model, designed to maximize their participation in heterogeneous classes. English language learners, including students determined at risk due to poor language development, receive differentiated support in classes and access to specific academic interventions, which improve literacy skills.

An ongoing system of professional development, led by the principal and the very knowledgeable staff developers, is helping teachers to become more skilled in using data to identify areas of need and interventions to support students, as well as opportunities for curriculum enhancements. Similarly, teachers are becoming more knowledgeable about analysis of cohort data and reviewing past performance of all groups of students, often leading to curricular changes, although these systems are not completely formalized at this time. As part of the ongoing effort to improve how the school monitors individual performance over time, teachers meet every spring to share information and programmatic recommendations about individual students moving on to the next grade level. The school does not yet utilize this data to set specific individual goals for every student, nor strongly utilize links with similar schools to share best practices.

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 well developed.

The principal has a clear vision for whole-school improvement focused on high expectations for all members of the school community. Collaborative conversations and ongoing reflection with teachers about how to improve the effectiveness of interim and formative measures resulted in a partnership with the Center for Inquiry to develop “design your own” interim assessments in English language arts and math. Interdisciplinary teams of teachers participated in the learning required to develop the interim assessments and the school is focusing on determining the effectiveness of the initiative. This year, the school placed additional emphasis on building consistency of practice using rubrics, standards for interdisciplinary project based work, and English language arts and math portfolios. The school does not yet offer interim assessments and portfolios in all content areas.

When the inquiry team’s focus on seventh graders struggling with literacy issues yielded an important observation about the lack of consistent expectations for content writing across all subject areas, the team recommended a plan to address organization and conventions in every subject. This work began immediately, but the principal, program coordinator, and staff developers are supporting teachers’ learning in writing instruction for further implementation.

Teachers, parents, and students embrace the collegial and collaborative culture of the school and the commitment to student achievement. Teachers share instructional strategies and work together to build a caring and rigorous learning environment. Students indicate that they get good feedback from teachers, saying, “Our grading system helps us figure out how we are doing and what we need to improve.” Similarly, parents appreciate the open communication about students’ progress, the access to student work and portfolios, and the focus on project-based work and critical thinking skills. The school, with leadership from the parent coordinator, has developed an effective family outreach program designed to keep parents involved.

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 well developed.

The curriculum work and instructional practices emphasized in the school, including the workshop model and differentiation, provide opportunities for gathering meaningful data and implementing strategies to raise student achievement. The “Understanding by Design” model informs benchmarks in curriculum maps. Teachers meet in grade level and department teams to assess progress and plan interventions and curricular enhancements through rigorously assessing student work. The science department is reviewing notebooks, conferencing notes, labs, and projects to determine if the established benchmarks require re-prioritizing or further development. The school encourages curriculum review as part of the ongoing work to improve student performance. Lessons do not offer sufficient challenge in English language arts to higher achieving students.

Students know the adults in the school respect and care about them. They enjoy coming to school, evidenced by the 97% attendance rate, and take advantage of the many opportunities to obtain extra support because, as one student indicated, “It is important for us to get ready for high school.” They cite the visibility of the principal and program coordinator and the accessibility of teachers as strengths of the school. Teachers feel accountable for students’ success. As one teacher expressed, “I ask myself all the time what I can do to help my students.” The principal regularly reviews performance data from classes and has individual conversations with teachers to focus on goal setting aligned to student progress.

The school offers a broad and engaging curriculum with an emphasis on integration of the arts and interdisciplinary project-based work. Classrooms are student centered and teachers act as facilitators and coaches encouraging active learning. Staffing, budgeting, and scheduling decisions reflect the principal’s vision for a successful school, and support teacher and student learning well. Staff developers coach in all content areas and work in concert with the administration to develop consistent rubrics and assessment practices.

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 well developed.

The school is committed to hiring staff that understand and share its vision of high expectations and a commitment to reflection and ongoing learning. Teachers are expected to be collaborative, use data to inform differentiated instruction, and hold themselves accountable for student progress and performance. Professional development is well planned and organized and is a high priority for the school community. Mentors and coaches support new teachers well through collaborative planning and intervisitations. The principal, program coordinator, and staff developers are highly visible in classrooms. Teachers benefit from good quality and encouraging feedback, ongoing support, and the opportunity to visit each other’s classrooms and engage in reflective conversations.

Teachers set professional goals aligned to whole-school goals and in collaboration with the principal and staff developers. Professional development sessions emphasize the gathering and use of data, as well as effective differentiation of instruction, to promote student achievement.

The school runs in a very orderly manner and teachers credit the principal and program coordinator for developing effective organizational and management structures that support their work. The principal is also highly respected for the collaborative approach she uses in keeping the focus on the important work of teaching and learning. As one teacher indicated, "She takes away obstacles and helps us do our best work."

The school places great emphasis on meeting the social and emotional needs of students and uses several guidance structures, including pupil personnel meetings, advisory, and support from the NYU Child Study Team to assist young people. Additional partnerships with EduChange, Town Hall, Manhattan Youth, and Teachers College enhance the overall instructional and curriculum offerings.

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 proficient.

The school effectively utilizes data from diagnostic tools, a variety of formative assessments, and standardized tests to measure success and adjust instructional plans and interventions. Detailed report cards are analyzed quarterly, along with data from the interim assessments in English language arts and math, and information from project-based work and other formative measures. Teams of teachers meet to determine which students require interventions and both parents and students are included in the scheduling of extra support. Similarly, the school reviews information for high-achieving students to ensure that they are appropriately challenged, although specific attention is not yet focused on increasing the level 4 performance of students.

When data indicates that groups of students are not meeting specific learning goals, the school carefully adjusts practice, through either immediate interventions or long range planning for the next school year. The work of the inquiry team is an example of a response to a pressing need to work on organization and conventions in content writing, even while more significant planning and professional development continues. Math and science departments are also using standards to develop benchmarks and adjust curriculum maps accordingly.

The principal and staff developers collaborate well with teachers on goal setting and link professional development to these specific goals. Assessing teachers' progress in meeting goals is a collegial process involving reflection, observations, and focused conversations on student achievement. The school provides very good support for teachers.

The "design your own" assessments and portfolios provide very useful data. However, these measures are only currently being used in English language arts and math. The principal wishes to expand this work to all content areas and to develop formal processes to monitor student progress over time, through measurable benchmarks. The school's plan to work with "Schools Attuned" to further engage the school community in rigorous and individualized goal setting in order to improve student achievement is also in the beginning stages.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Hudson River Middle School	△	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

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.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X	

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.

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X		

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped