



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry

**Middle School 328
401 West 164 Street
New York
NY 10032**

Principal: Jorge Estrella

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Lead Reviewer: Chris Andrews

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry is a middle school with 595 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 12% Black, 87% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 42% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 92.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 95% eligibility.

The school shares its building with a second middle school and also shares the cafeteria and the auditorium. There are no external areas for the students to use and the main building is very crowded, with narrow staircases. There are no specialist rooms for music, art or technology. These factors make the delivery of the curriculum more challenging, but the effective use of laptop carts offsets the absence of a computer lab.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The collection of data is very good and there are structures in place to make this data accessible to all teachers.
- Collaborative planning is excellent, with realistic but challenging goals for classes and grades that relate to the prior performance of the students.
- Provision for students who are in need of particular support, especially the English language learners, is of a high quality.
- Expectations are very high and are well understood by students and parents.
- Students enjoy coming to school, feel very safe and have a high regard for their teachers and the principal.
- There is a strong sense of community within the school which is reflected in the excellent relationships which exist amongst students, teachers and parents.
- The distributed leadership structure introduced by the principal is central to the development of the school as a genuine learning community.
- Professional development for teachers is very well aligned both with the needs of the school and with teachers own aspirations and goals.
- There is an excellent cycle of monitoring and reviewing plans which is focused on both student and teacher outcomes
- The principal has a very clear vision both for the school as an institution and for the students, and has both the capacity and the support to make this vision a reality.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the expertise of all teachers in interpreting data and applying that interpretation to their instruction so that practices become embedded in school routine.
- Address the performance imbalance between girls and boys more systematically.
- Ensure that there is a good balance between teacher-led instruction and opportunities for students to work independently or in different forms of small group instruction.

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.

Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry is a school that has made very good progress in the academic development of its students and in the culture of the school in the three years of its existence. It is an institution in which its students have pride, as one said, "It is a great place to be." Parents also are pleased to send their children to the school. It is a genuine learning community, reflecting the principal's philosophy of teachers and students developing together. The dynamic school leadership has helped deliver year on year progress in test scores and improvements in language skills of the large proportion of the school who are English language learners. Students have an input into certain school-wide decisions through the student government and they are involved in the learning walks which are an important element of school improvement. Students also appreciate the opportunities presented to them to visit places both in New York and beyond which are unfamiliar to them. The school leadership clearly communicates its high expectations to all students and staff. The excellent level of collaboration among all in the school community drives good student progress. The monitoring and revision cycle of student and teacher goals is effective and leads to improved outcomes

Since the last Quality Review there has been good progress in terms of differentiated instruction, although the school recognizes that there is not yet the desired balance between teacher-led instruction and opportunities for students to work independently. The school halls now show examples of high quality student work on display. Professional development is central to the culture of the school and much work has been done to develop teaching reading skills. There are now plans in place to embed the teachers' use of data more firmly into school routines. The school is rich in data and is developing sophisticated tools to use that data. This is reflected in the work of the inquiry team which is well established with a range of key questions to drive further school improvement, particularly as performance differences between boys and girls provides one of the areas for investigation.

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.

All students are assessed at the start of each year using the Standardized Testing and Reporting tests which provide a baseline level and also identify students with particular needs. These tests highlight the next learning steps for each student in terms of individual instruction and also are used to inform the goal setting process. The collection of data is very good and there are structures in place to make this data accessible to all teachers. In addition to the standardized scores from State and City tests, the school makes extensive

use of the Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math computer programs to generate data for immediate information about students' progress.

There is a particular focus on gathering data for English language learners who make up a significant part of the school's enrollment. The school analyzes data carefully in terms of the different subgroups and has identified differences in performance between boys and girls. Although some steps have been taken to reduce this gender imbalance, the school recognizes the need to address the gap between girls and boys more systematically.

The principal reviews the progress of his students as it compares to similar schools, and this has led to the development of a close relationship with one particular school. The collection of data and the sharing of expertise with this school have both been central to the year on year progress that the school has made in terms of student scores in the standardized tests. They show consistent increases in Level 3 and 4 scores, with a matching fall in the percentage of level 1 scores. All of this is clear from the school's own year on year records. However the school recognizes that the continued development of teachers' expertise in interpreting data, and applying that interpretation to their instruction, is central to embedding these practices in school routine.

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.

Excellent collaborative planning enables the school to set realistic but challenging goals for classes and grades that derive from prior performance of the students. Close scrutiny of student scores at class level provide accurate numerical goals which inform instruction at all levels. This analysis of student scores identifies those capable of moving up a level and the curriculum is aligned accordingly. The aggregation of these figures provides realistic whole school goals, along with a clear indication which students should be making the transition from level to level. Other data sources such as tests showing skills analysis, students' portfolios and teacher conferencing inform the short term steps required to achieve these goals. As a result teachers direct their instruction effectively and students make good progress.

The goals are shared with the wider school community. Students are able to explain their goals. They know that the grade goal for reading is that all students should move at least two levels in the year but they can also say that their own goal is to be a good Level 5 by the end of the year, having started at Level 3. Expectations are very high and these are shared so that the school's requirements are well understood by students and parents. Expectations refer to self-discipline and appearance as well as to study habits and behavior in class. The focused attention in classes and the wearing of school uniform by virtually all students, except on their birthdays when they wear street clothes as a treat, are evidence that students respond to these expectations.

Support for students who are in need of particular help, especially the English language learners, is of a high quality and is reflected in the success of these students both in terms of their confidence in the use of English and their success in tests. In keeping with the principal's determination that all students are treated the same, the expectations of both special education students and English language learners are high. Their goals are established by the same process as other students, are factored into the wider grade and school goals, and are reviewed in the same way. As a consequence these students make good progress. The pupil personnel team supports all students in special education as well as others in need of specific interventions after ensuring that teachers have implemented a range of strategies themselves.

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.

A wealth of data from the computer programs and tests provide the evidence to inform teachers’ planning effectively. Since the last Quality Review the issue of differentiated instruction has been a key focus and progress, as recorded in observation notes by the administration, has been marked. There is a recognition that there is not yet the desired balance between teacher-led instruction and opportunities for students to work independently or in different forms of small group instruction. There is a consistency of planning with clear teaching points and periods of reflection at the end of the period which is effectively embedding students’ learning.

Students are generally engaged by the instruction and particularly enjoy discussions which help develop their language skills and the computer programs which inform them about their progress towards their goals. They enjoy coming to school, feel very safe and have a high regard for their teachers and the principal because, “They teach us well.” Parents rightly share this view and one commented that, “The teachers are really doing their job” in helping their children to progress. This progress has been greatly facilitated by the principal’s skillful management of resources. The introduction of team teaching as a response to classes at maximum capacity has also proven to be a valuable source of professional development for the teachers involved as well as impacting on students’ progress and the further development of differentiated instruction. The purchase of Smartboards, laptop carts and science inquiry kits has offset some of the difficulties experienced because of the lack of specialist rooms. Parents comment most positively about the ongoing progress made in terms of student attitudes and behaviour. There is clear evidence in the air of purposeful activity in the classrooms and the sense of order in the halls and on staircases that there is a strong sense of community within the school. This is also reflected in the strong relationships which exist between students, teachers and parents.

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 principal ties the professional development of the teachers to the progress of the students in a very structured fashion, monitoring the impact of professional development on student scores. The distributed leadership structure introduced by him is central to this professional development and the administration sees its role as one of building capacity for the future. The use of the California Standards for the Teaching Profession secures consistency of practice both in terms of instruction and in the assessment of teachers’ skills. The standards also inform individual teacher’s plans which arise either from the observations of the administration or from the teacher’s own requests. In this way professional development for teachers is very well aligned both with the needs of the school and with teachers’ own aspirations and goals. The principal applies the same approach to his assistant principals, each of whom has fifteen days internship alongside the principal to develop their whole school understanding.

Learning walks have proved to be a very powerful tool in terms of sharing good practice as well as assessing instruction and the climate for learning around the school. Students are involved in these and their comments are recorded and acted upon. This involvement impacts positively on their self-esteem as well as providing the school with a different perspective on what is happening in the classrooms. As the professional development records of all teachers are published in the main school hallway there is a very real sense of learning together which reinforces the idea of the school as a genuine learning community.

Partnerships with outside entities and community based organizations are closely aligned to school and student goals. Whole school planning has been enhanced by work with the Harvard Institute for School Leadership and staff development by the presence of tutors from New York University working in the classroom. The principal selects the providers and programs to ensure that they meet student needs in terms of both academic and personal development. Students particularly appreciate the trips to places such as Philadelphia and Boston, the latter chosen by grade 8 students themselves. The school sees these activities as contributing to the development of the whole child and giving them a range of experiences they would otherwise not have.

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 well developed.

There is an excellent cycle of monitoring and reviewing plans which has contributed significantly to the notable progress made by the school in the past three years. The goals set in content areas are both measurable and time related. They are reviewed four times a year, and this is also linked to reflection on teachers' progress. This effectively allows the principal and the administration to evaluate the impact of professional development on student progress. Appropriate interventions are then put in place for the next review period as required. The introduction of team teaching in certain classes in each grade came as a result of this analysis, as well as from the need to reduce class size. For both teachers and students there are clear strategies to follow the analysis in the event of there being a need for further support. In certain cases individual plans for teacher development may have goals which are reviewed and built upon within a month. The pupil personnel team reviews all special education students on a regular basis and makes appropriate modifications to the interventions in place, always ensuring that these constitute the least intrusive environment for the students. As a result these students have an updated program of support and, should they transfer into general education, a structured support plan to ensure that the transition is effective and problem free.

The principal has a very clear vision both for the school as an institution and for the students. The distributed leadership reflects one element of this in that the principal is building capacity so that the school will be, in his own words, "self-sustaining" with systems and procedures in place that will allow it to continue to run effectively. His vision for the students is shared by them and they can articulate their goals and expectations with confidence. The progress which the school has made in the past three years, both academic and in terms of the developing culture, suggests that this vision is both realistic and attainable.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Manhattan Middle School for Scientific Inquiry	△	➤	✓	+	◇
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 demanding, 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 . . .	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?				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?				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	