

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2008-2009**

**Middle School for the Arts**

**Middle School 587**

**790 East New York Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: Susan Hobson-Ransom**

**Dates of review: March 4 - 5, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Rhonda Hurdle-Taylor**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Middle School for the Arts is a middle school with 368 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 93% Black, 6% Hispanic and 1% White students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 88.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 98% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal has developed a warm and caring school community. As a school of the arts students are encouraged to showcase their artwork and their work is consistently celebrated. The principal is keenly aware of the needs of the school community and as a result the school collects and reviews data on individuals, classes, grades and the school.

Teachers receive a wide range of information regarding their students and are beginning to have conversations around the data as they plan for instruction. They use a variety of in-house and Department of Education systems to track student performance and progress. Teachers have not established the practice of setting individual student goals, with interim checkpoints to carefully examine their effectiveness, so that students understand the next steps in their learning and how to achieve their learning goals.

The school has an extensive curriculum in the core subjects that is enhanced by its infusion with the arts. However, there is inadequate delivery of services to lower-performing students, or enrichment to higher-performing students to provide them with opportunities to improve their outcomes. In addition, the delivery of instruction is not sufficiently challenging or engaging. Although some teachers differentiate instruction, this is not consistent as the majority of teachers do not provide classroom instruction that is rigorous or differentiated so that students can meet their learning targets. The assistant principals meet with staff within their departments to assist them in developing instructional plans. However, most teachers do not set interim targets or timeframes for revisiting and revising their goals for improving instruction.

The school maintains effective partnerships and collaborations with Community Based Organizations around addressing the academic, artistic, social and personal needs of the students. Teachers care about the welfare of their students and willingly provide strong support for their academic and social development. Parents appreciate the opportunities their children are given to participate in activities that focus on the whole child, and are pleased that the school is a safe, supportive and secure place.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The administration and staff are committed to creating an atmosphere that showcases their work as a school of the arts.
- The administration and staff work hard to create a safe and secure learning environment and are eager to provide solid support for students' academic and social development.
- The school has a wide curriculum enhanced by the incorporation of the arts and by building partnerships with outside agencies.
- School leaders and staff collect formative and summative data for individual students, class, grade and school for English language arts, math and some other subjects, which shows what students know and which informs planning.
- Parents are happy with the support and nurturing their children receive from the staff at the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers use student, classroom and school data consistently in order to differentiate instruction in all core areas.
- Ensure that challenging whole school, subject and classroom goals are established, with interim checkpoints to monitor their effectiveness and progress.
- Improve the strategic use of data to monitor student progress and progress made in reaching long-term goals.
- Create a consistent and clearly defined structure for lessons so that they improve instruction to ensure rigor and challenge for student learning.
- Establish a school wide system for setting learning goals so that students understand the next steps in their learning and how to achieve them.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

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

The school reviews a wide range of school-generated as well as standardized student data. It has appropriate systems in place that allow it to analyze individual, class, grade, and school results by subjects, for English language learners and special education students. The administrative team and faculty monitor trends of performance and identify key areas of instructional needs. By doing so they are able to document the progress of their special education sub-group and identify that they are not making adequate progress. To address this problem the principal has opened a teacher center and has hired a staff developer to work directly with teachers servicing this sub-group. The staff developer also provides direct instruction to special education students. The school effectively analyzes literacy and math achievement data. Teachers spend time during their common planning periods reviewing class and individual results so that they have an understanding of trends in student performance and to inform their instruction. Acuity results and teacher assessments assist teachers in keeping track of individual student performance and developing an understanding of students' strengths and areas for improvement. The school does not disaggregate data by gender so as to make informed decisions to support the academic progress of their male and female students.

Teachers maintain classroom data on their students' performance which they use to improve their instructional practices and keep track of their students' day-to-day performance. One grade 6 teacher stated "This system of record keeping and data analysis allows me to conference with my students one-on-one." As a result, this teacher's students know how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve their performance and the teacher is able to adjust her instructional practice. However, there is no established school-wide practice to guarantee that all teachers keep track of data to assist them in differentiating instruction and to effectively group students with similar learning needs. Student work on display often does not include relevant feedback with next steps to help students monitor their progress.

**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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

The school sets long-term quantitative goals focused on raising student achievement in grades 6 through 8 in literacy and mathematics. The staff then use the results from predictive assessments as well as in-house interim assessments to measure student performance and monitor individual student progress. Teachers meet with assistant

principals to set qualitative long-range instructional goals built around school-wide goals. They use results from diagnostic tests and standardized assessments to identify students who are eligible to receive academic intervention services. However, the school does not set differentiated interim targets and benchmarks for each student to measure the success of instruction. Although students believe that they work hard and that the school holds high academic expectations, students are minimally involved in setting learning goals. Individual students are unable to articulate their present level of proficiency in reading and or mathematics based on results from ARIS or Acuity and could not effectively communicate specific next steps for improving outcomes. As a result, students are unaware of what they need to do to improve their academic achievement.

The principal has established a good collaborative tone within the school. Faculty and parents work together to develop a Comprehensive Educational Plan that reflects the needs of the students, with the intention of improving student academic performance. The work on data assessment being initiated by the inquiry team has set a precedent among the staff for reviewing student progress and planning for intervention. This year's team admits to being more focused on student performance and data analysis as they pay closer attention to their targeted at-risk grade 7 students who are performing in the lowest one-third in both English language arts and mathematics. The inquiry team's work is beginning to have a positive impact school-wide as teachers look more closely at data to assess students' performance and progress. At grade level and departmental conferences, teachers are also beginning to have conversations around data to ensure appropriate goals are set in all subjects in order to improve student achievement. The school has established various methods through which they maintain an open dialogue with parents and students about their learning. Parents receive quarterly progress reports with their child's present performance level in core subject areas. These reports do not demonstrate on-going performance data so that parents and students can effectively track their progress and identify next steps.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.**

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

The school curriculum in the core subjects is standards-based and there is some alignment between English language arts, social studies and the arts. The school has structured weekly common planning periods for teachers by grade and by department. This allows small groups of teachers to have deeper, more meaningful conversations around student work. As a result of these conversations, teams are planning interdisciplinary units which allow students to have a more thematic approach to their learning. Still, the school does not provide rigorous enrichment opportunities that challenge the thinking of higher achieving students or adequate support services for lower achieving students. The school is working with a community-based organization to expand its arts program and to effectively incorporate the arts within its core curriculum. As an outgrowth of the inquiry team's work, teachers in the arts department are planning lessons that include the literacy skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, the delivery of instruction is not consistently challenging and does not always reflect rigor. As a result, not all students are sufficiently engaged and English language arts, math and grade 8 social studies test scores do not indicate a high level of student proficiency.

Teachers maintain and review a variety of data to guide instruction. In a grade 6 English language arts class where the teacher differentiated the group tasks, students were challenged and engaged, and work on display showed that students were making academic progress. However, differentiated classroom instruction is not an embedded school-wide practice. During a grade 8 science lesson on genetic traits as they relate to the aging process, a creative attempt was made to involve students. However, the lesson was not challenging, reflective of the students' needs or ability, nor was it differentiated in any way. The teacher was not able to suitably assess learning.

The principal uses all available resources effectively to make organizational decisions that positively impact on student academic and personal growth, and school tone. A wide-range of instructional materials and small class size ensure a strong focus on improving student outcomes. Extended-day and after-school programs provide students with additional support in English language arts, mathematics and the arts. However, while performance goals are set in each of these departments, some at-risk students are not engaged in meeting their learning goals.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

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

Teachers meet often for common planning sessions and in their professional learning communities and engage in meaningful professional development activities focused on developing best instructional practices. Activities are planned around the needs of the faculty and whole-school initiatives involve all staff members in learning new ways to better engage students in the learning process. This is an effective way of strengthening teacher practice but it is too early to evaluate its impact on student progress. Assistant principals and the teacher center staff developer collaborate successfully to provide teachers with opportunities to improve their craft and to learn best practices. New teachers feel comfortable knowing that there are structures in place to provide them with necessary support. Administrators employ daily formal and informal observations to identify the needs of the staff, provide support and monitor the implementation of best practices. The principal encourages and provides opportunities for classroom inter-visitiation so that teachers are able to share what they do best. This is effective in enhancing the instructional practices of struggling colleagues.

The school's approach to improving student achievement effectively addresses meeting the needs of the whole child. Outside resources complement the instructional agenda which ensures that the social and physical wellbeing of each child remains a priority. Parents are pleased that their children are offered these opportunities for a well-rounded education and are happy that teachers show that they care for their children. Teachers often call home with encouraging news and ideas on how parents can best support their children at home.

The principal is proud of the school's focus as a school of the arts and works hard to encourage staff and students to celebrate and showcase students' artistic abilities. All around the building there is evidence of this sense of pride and celebration. Ongoing partnerships with student support services connect students and their families with the appropriate services. Effective collaboration with outside organizations bring needed resources in the areas of literacy and the arts to the school including a newsletter club,

visits to VIBE magazine, a long-term project to upgrade the technology in the school's library and opportunities for students to train and audition with influential dance schools.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 underdeveloped with proficient features.**

The principal is well respected by students, parents and staff and has a clear vision that is shared by the school community for advancing the school. She genuinely cares about students' academic performance and continuing progress. Ongoing evaluation of interim assessment data and students' class work provides solid information regarding student performance. This information is generally used to group students and to monitor their performance and progress. However, departmental plans, and student goals, do not take into account an effective process for demonstrating growth. They do not incorporate quantifiable interim benchmarks and timeframes for gauging the impact of instruction on student achievement. School goals are not accessed sufficiently and the curriculum plans are not adjusted in response to declines in student achievement and progress.

The school reviews data effectively to evaluate organizational decisions. For example, data showed poor performance on the grade 8 social studies exam. As a result, the English language arts assistant principal is now working closely with social studies teachers to transfer the existing best practices in English language arts into social studies. In addition, social studies teachers meet with English language arts teachers in common planning periods. These measures are proving effective in improving practice.

A highly self-reflective educator, the principal continually strives "to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning". She engages in professional learning activities that help her in her efforts to lead the school. She is equally focused on helping teachers become better "at their craft" thereby creating a solid base of staff members who work collaboratively to improve student achievement.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Middle School For The Arts</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		X		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?		X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			X	
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?		X		
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?		X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X		

## DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X		

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.**

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X	

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

<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X		
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?		X		
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X		

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed