

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Middle School for Art and Philosophy

Middle School 588

**1084 Lenox Road
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Andrew Buck

Dates of review: April 23 - 24, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Middle School for Art and Philosophy is a middle school with 173 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 92% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 53% and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 93.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school community is working together to create a "positive school tone and climate." As a result, a large majority of students and teachers report that discipline and safety has much improved from last year. Regular school-wide events, frequent letters and notices to parents and mid-term marking reports are praised by parents as good communication systems and they appreciate the academic and personal support that their children receive from administration and staff.

There are effective features in school practice that provide a basis on which to build. The principal and cabinet make very good use of English language arts and math performance data. This analysis has a strong influence on academic intervention and guides school provision for instruction and the organization of resources for positive learning. Through thriving visual arts and philosophy programs, students benefit from a curriculum that has interdisciplinary connections and everyday opportunities to utilize technology. Teachers within the math and science departments have begun to incorporate instructional practices that engender student focus and differentiated engagements. At present however, teachers' use and interpretation of data is inconsistent across the school, therefore differentiated instruction and tiered engagements are not sufficiently in place in all core and non-core subject areas. Academic goals are set once a month in math and science. The school is just beginning to set goals in English language arts and social studies. Although a small minority of teachers set student goals, the work lacks student input and skill-based strategies with next learning steps to support improved student outcomes. The school has rightly identified foci for whole school improvement, for example, differentiation of lessons and Positive Behavior Intervention Support. The inquiry team's work leads to targeted students making accelerated progress, and other students also benefit because of the team's prior work with a cohort of special education students.

The school has not yet successfully developed individualized plans for all teachers aligned with their diverse professional and personal needs. The absence of personal and professional goal setting hampers the school's ability to monitor the effectiveness of instituted professional development and the potential impact of actionable plans on each practitioner's delivery of data-driven instruction. The principal has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has a clear vision for development. This is not yet sufficiently shared with the school community to ensure full commitment of, and ownership by all members of staff.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A large majority of students exhibit high-level participation, therefore they benefit from broad visual arts experiences and opportunities to use technology.
- The school gathers a range of relevant data to review and plan interventions whenever appropriate.
- Families praise the frequent communication with the school, and appreciate the academic and personal support that their children receive from the staff, the parent coordinator and administrators.
- The inquiry team is effective and the principal has used its findings strategically to better inform instruction and intervention for the wider student body.
- The school has developed some strong partnerships that enhance students' academic and personal growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend data gathering and analysis practices to all core subjects to provide a complete picture of student progress, including all subgroups.
- Formalize professional development to address the implementation of differentiated planning, aligned to learning goals for individuals and groups of students.
- Ensure that teacher and student goal setting results in individual growth plans with measurable interim checkpoints and clearly stated responsibilities for tracking and monitoring.
- Provide more opportunities for all staff to engage in the decision making processes in the school, in order to improve communication and increase ownership in school improvement strategies.
- Establish clear expectations that effectively communicate instructional priorities, next step actions, success criteria and timeframes in support of improved student outcomes.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school collects relevant summative and formative data. School leaders analyze English language arts and math standardized test results at the beginning and end of the school year. This has enabled administrators to establish whole-school plans designed to address areas of need in providing academic interventions for underperforming students. All teachers gather and review student assessments in their respective content area. However, at present, this work leads to binders filled with a variety of under-utilized school and class-based data as not all teachers are confident in using the information to address the learning needs of all their students. The school has not yet developed consistent systems for studying and interpreting cumulative information to determine patterns and trends in student performance. Therefore, overall, the school does not have a complete picture of individual student progress or of learning outcomes for all groups of students in all core subject areas. Together, teachers and administrators analyze results of performance data in English language arts and math. As a result, they set lesson objectives that guide instructional foci and the development of curriculum maps and pacing calendars in these subjects. However, this analysis and subsequent action does not yet take place for all core subject areas. In addition, there are shortcomings in the use of data to track and monitor student's progress over time. An overwhelming majority of teachers interviewed expressed their need for professional development in using data to address the varying needs of students. One teacher stated, "We need to know more than just how to log into ARIS and Acuity".

In all core and non-core subjects, mid-term marking progress reports, coupled with Acuity login codes provide students and their parents with periodic information on students' academic performance. Parents appreciate the information that is provided. The school encourages parents to meet with teachers monthly to discuss their children's class performance. However, because not all teachers are secure in translating data into instructional plans, student progress and achievement evaluations are not yet precise enough to foster appropriate independent study or assist parents in understanding exactly how they can help at home.

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 takes care to fully involve parents and teachers in devising its Comprehensive Educational Plan. Consequently, teachers and parents have a good

understanding of whole-school goals, although appreciation of how these goals will be realized, monitored over time, and evaluated in order to promote school improvement lacks precision. The school has begun the work of goal setting in math and science. However, this work is presently underdeveloped in the areas of English language arts and social studies. The school does not identify interim measurable goals for its very small population of English language learners or for males who under-perform females. The principal is aware that the "time-bound goal setting is an area for improvement." In classes where teachers conduct monthly conferences, these teacher-student conversations do not yet include specific process strategies to guide students in reaching their goals or accelerate their learning. Students report that their teachers are concerned about their learning and "push them to their fullest." For example, teachers help them to understand by "repeat, repeat until you get it". As a result, students feel supported and successful in their learning. The large majority of teachers hold high expectations for their students, however not all lessons include appropriate differentiation with adequate levels of challenge and clear learning objectives to meet the particular needs of heterogeneous groups of students.

The school's parent coordinator is instrumental in engaging parents in the life of the school. Conversations with families and regular parent meetings about the importance of good attendance and positive learning behaviors promote the high expectations the school leaders and faculty hold for their students. In response to the number of suspensions last year, the school has adopted the Positive Behavior Intervention Support program. As a result, there has been a significant drop in incident reports compared to last year.

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 closely aligns its curriculum to State standards. Urban Art residencies support a varied and enriching arts program. During philosophy periods, students engage in critical thinking, speaking, listening, and reflective activities. The school has also emphasized the development of the workshop model in all core subjects. These initiatives have resulted in higher levels of student engagement and are beginning to improve consistency in teachers' practice. The principal is pleased that seventh grade students' attitudes about the importance of doing well academically have improved significantly since last year.

Professional development, coaching, and modeling on the use of SMART goals and differentiation of instruction have not yet taken root widely. As a school-wide focus, it is expected that teachers differentiate instruction for higher achieving and low performing students through purposeful grouping. While some teachers differentiate instruction by modifying the lesson content, differentiation is not a consistently applied element across the school. Therefore, some planning to meet diverse needs and learning styles of students is not sufficiently sharp.

The principal has made strategic decisions in the use of the budget in support of coherent and rigorous instructional approaches. Facilitated by a media specialist

resident, teachers and students benefit from opportunities to advance their learning with technology resources. This has led to increased chances to focus teaching by providing additional instructional aids that support students in technology aptitude. To bolster academic performance in math, this year the school re-staffed its math department and expanded academic intervention offerings. The work undertaken by most staff has done much to enhance students' representation of their math thinking. Acuity and Scantron Performance Series assessments in math reflect an overall increase in students' performance.

The principal has made suitable responses to general community needs through the hiring of two assistant principals, the appointment of a dean, staffing a parent coordinator and with the introduction of positive behavior incentives. However, although teachers articulate supportive and respectful relationships with colleagues and note improvement in interactions between students and adults in the building, some staff voice dissatisfaction with communication and support from administration.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The principal is acutely aware of the strengths and areas for development of the school. Consequently, he and the assistant principals have developed partnerships with other professional institutions to provide intermittent training to new and senior teachers. New teachers articulate their satisfaction with individualized support from mentors as well as from network specialists and consultants. While senior teachers have opportunities to deepen their pedagogical knowledge by attending professional development workshops and training aligned with curriculum and instructional goals, they express a need for more "in-house professional development around school issues". In-house learning opportunities like weekly common planning and informal and formal observations are not wholly effective in securing improvement. The reason for this is that self-evaluation and regular feedback to reflect teacher performance and identify goals for improvement are not as consistent or systemic as they could be. Recently created professional development plans lack interim benchmarks and essential strategies to foster self-managed professional and personal growth throughout the school.

The inquiry team is highly effective in focusing in on two cohorts of students across the grades, by looking at high achieving math students and underperforming English language arts students. Last year's findings on the positive impact of time on task and small group intervention has cascaded to other teachers through collaborative case studies that focus on a particular student of interest. A product of the team's findings is "Kid Talk". This year, the team and colleagues meet to engage in conversations about students to deepen teacher understanding, promote the development of specific rigorous assessments, and garner perspectives from their content area teachers. In turn, students make very good improvement from a regimen of targeted support. As such, the team influences data collection school-wide and the practice of looking at student work for improved delivery of instruction.

The school has established effective partnerships to accelerate students' academic and personal growth. BRIC/Rotunda Gallery, Urban Arts partnership and the Institute for

Advancement for Philosophy for Children (IAPC) Montclair University assist the school in meeting priorities and establishing best practice in teaching and learning. Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation provide a valuable range of support to aid student academic, personal, and emotional development by integrating their services into classrooms, assisting groups of students during the regular school day and providing supervision during extra-curricular activities.

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 school is at an early stage in evaluating the effectiveness of the initiatives that have been introduced, and in monitoring the impact of teachers' professional development on student outcomes. Although the principal's shared observations of lessons provide the potential for developing an understanding of the progress the school needs to make in securing improvement, the absence of rigorous goal setting with measurable outcomes hampers its evaluation of up-to-date effectiveness. For example, while teachers examine student data in English language arts and math, they miss the opportunity to look at subgroups and other core subjects regularly enough. Some grades and departments are beginning to develop strategies and systems to effect positive improvement but this is not consistent across the school.

The school analyzes the predictive and interim assessments provided by the Department of Education, but there is little evidence of close monitoring and evaluation of this data leading to its use in setting and revising school curriculum goals and pacing calendars in all subject areas. As a result, school-wide plans do not look in detail at how to address trends and patterns in student outcomes or consider how the school will monitor and evaluate progress toward intended goals. The school has not determined a method for ensuring that each grade can assess students within each core subject, monitor progress and set measurable goals for school improvement. The principal is, nonetheless, a reflective practitioner and uses source documents like the Quality Review, and the Progress Report to help him review the school's practices. For example, this year in response to this information, the principal reorganized the math department, created further professional development opportunities and bolstered the inquiry team's work. These changes have had a direct impact on student-centered classroom engagements and the delivery of cohesive daily instruction. While the commitment of school leaders strongly supports a culture of school-wide improvement, staff and parents communicate uncertainty when talking about how the school will secure improvement. A teacher described the school as "a work in progress."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Middle School for Art and Philosophy	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score		X		
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.				
<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		
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 student’s learning.				
<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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		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, DYO, 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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X		

Quality Review Scoring Key

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