

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Muscota New School

Elementary School 314

**4862 Broadway
New York
NY 10034**

Principal: Tomasz Grabski

Dates of review: May 11 – 12, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Martha Madera

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Muscota New School is an elementary school with 277 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 6% Black, 68% Hispanic, 21% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 92.6%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Muscota is a progressive school of choice, strongly committed to a holistic approach to education in order to develop and educate the whole child. The newly appointed principal, along with teachers and parents, all work together to ensure that each student's strengths are developed within an inclusive and caring school community. Parents feel welcome and appreciate that teachers are always available to conduct ongoing formal and informal conferences to discuss mutual concerns that affect their children's progress in school. They note that the teachers know their students individually, as is evident by the detailed narrative reports they receive twice-yearly about their child's education.

Since last year's Quality Review the school has focused on collecting a wider range of formative and summative data and staff use it effectively to assess the performance of classes, subgroups and individual students. The principal champions the use of data and, as a result, data is at the heart of the school's goal setting, planning, and monitoring of student progress. Focused professional development supports teachers in making sense of student achievement data. During weekly assessment periods teachers meet by grade to review data and plan for instructional next steps. However, the plans lack consistency in setting individual short-term student learning goals that have suitable timeframes for meeting their long-term goals. The school has plans to continue to develop goal setting with individual students so that they are aware of and involved in the small measurable steps that they need to take to improve and can be partners in their own learning.

The school delivers an engaging, inter-grade curriculum that places a strong emphasis on all core subjects and is based on the premise that children need to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills by active engagement. Using a thematic approach, units are developed that incorporate educational field trips and support project learning. Teachers plan lessons and activities that support thematic units. However, plans lack differentiated classroom learning activities to meet the needs of individual students. Because classes are structured in a multi-grade configuration the school has developed curriculum maps in English language arts to ensure that instruction is aligned to each student's grade-appropriate state standards. However, curriculum maps are not available for science, math and social studies. To move forward, the principal has established as a priority the development of curriculum maps in all other core subjects to ensure that curriculum topics are covered in alignment with State guidelines.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school collects, reviews, and analyzes a range of data to assess the performance of the school, classes, subgroups and individual students.
- Relationships across the school are warm, supportive and inclusive and, as a result, students, teachers and parents feel valued, identify with, and take pride in being a part of the Muscota community.
- The principal uses data regularly to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices and makes organizational modifications to support professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies.
- The principal has a coherent vision for the school's development that is understood and embraced by all members of the school community.
- Structured professional collaboration during weekly cohort meetings allows teachers to share good practices, analyze data, assess students' needs and adjust curriculum plans.
- Parents value the school's unique family atmosphere and support, and appreciate the opportunities that allow them to engage in an open exchange of information about the progress and learning needs of their children.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish more consistency in setting short-term student learning goals so that they are understood by students and shared with their parents.
- Improve the consistency of differentiation of classroom learning activities to provide appropriate challenges aligned to each student's achievement level.
- Extend the strategic planning process in order to ensure all curriculum planning includes measurable interim goals, suitable timeframes and modification of instruction to evaluate student's learning outcomes.
- Continue the development of curriculum maps to better support multi-grade classes, ensuring that instruction is aligned to each child's grade-appropriate State standards.

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 has made good progress since the last Quality Review in further developing the use of both formative and summative data to track student progress and identify the performance of different classes, sub-groups and individual students. Looking at student data has become a more formalized practice at the school. Teachers and administrators work collaboratively to improve the school's data-gathering and interpretation processes. At weekly assessment periods, teachers are provided with the opportunity to analyze the results of unit assessments, conference notes, running records, projects and student work, in order to monitor their progress and to discuss next steps and implication for instruction. In addition, this year the school has developed, in collaboration with Long Island University, Design Your Own interim assessments in math. These assessments provide detailed information on specific math strands. Teachers then use Design Your Own Sheets to record their reflection on individual students and their running records. The school has had a long-standing tradition of using the descriptive review method in order to understand students' learning through deep analysis of their work and, as a result, teachers write detailed narrative reports on their students twice a year. These narratives are shared with parents and are passed along from one year to the next, enabling teachers to have a longitudinal view of students' social and emotional growth. The review of both formative and summative data puts the school in a good position to further expand and refine its vision of educating the whole child. The principal also makes use of the data to monitor teachers' performance and select topics for professional development.

Further analysis by the principal ensures that the performance of English language learners and special education students is closely monitored. As a result, the inquiry team has identified English language learners as its target population and is currently working to identify instructional strategies to support their learning. Intervention providers monitor the progress and performance of special education students through individual education plans which are shared with classroom teachers to further support a cohesive instructional plan that addresses the identified strengths and weaknesses of each student. The school provides ample opportunities for parents to engage in an open exchange of information about the progress and learning needs of their children. Regular feedback is provided to them through formal and informal meetings. Attendance data is monitored closely by the principal, who has established an effective attendance incentive program to address absences and lateness.

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 proficient.

Good structures allow teachers and administrators to meet regularly to discuss, review and formulate the school’s vision and set goals that are grounded in high expectations for all students. Teachers meet with individual parents and students early in the school year during goal-setting conferences to incorporate the goals students have already thought about for themselves, as well as those that parents identify for their children. These conversations drive the annual goals teachers identify for individual students, allowing all stakeholders to have input into the process. The school views parents as equal partners and regularly engages them in an open exchange of information about the progress and learning needs of their children. In addition to frequent informal interactions teachers report to families twice yearly using six-page narrative reports which describe and explain the progress students are making in school and the next steps they need to take to improve their learning.

The principal and faculty meet regularly to discuss, review and monitor student progress towards meeting established goals. Teachers analyze the results of unit tests, periodic assessments, conference notes and student work in order to discuss next steps and implication for instruction. Classroom teachers meet with students weekly to assess how students are doing and to provide feedback that helps students to understand the next steps they need to take to continue their academic growth. Individual teachers set learning goals for each student, but there is not a formalized and systematic approach across the whole school. Some of the goals are long-term, such as to improve Fountas and Pinnell levels and to be on grade level by end of the year. Specific measurable interim benchmarks to support students as they work towards achieving these long-term goals are missing. Students in the upper grades can articulate their overall goals but cannot always describe what strategies they need to use to reach them.

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 proficient.

Using a thematic approach the school offers students a challenging and engaging curriculum in all core subjects. Educational field trips that take student learning beyond classroom walls support project-based learning and hands-on activities, which are at the core of the curriculum implementation. Incorporating all of the components of Balanced Literacy, classroom teachers research the unit of study looking for the “Big Idea” so that they are then able to plan lessons that are integrated and support small group instruction in order to ensure that the needs of lower and higher achieving students are addressed.

Because the school implements multi-grade classes, efforts are under way to develop curriculum maps in all core subjects that will ensure instruction is aligned to each student’s grade-appropriate State standards. Currently the school has only developed curriculum maps in English language arts and does not address grade differentiation of instruction in math, social studies and science. The principal provides opportunities for teachers to meet weekly to make revisions to the curriculum as needed and to plan differentiated lessons for their students. However, classroom instruction does not reflect

differentiated planning. Students engaged in small group work are often working on the same task, resulting in learning activities that do not always provide appropriate challenges aligned to each student's achievement level. The school offers enrichment programs to its students, with a wide range of learning opportunities in the arts, music and drama. These further enhance the educational experience of students, ensuring that their personal growth is developed alongside academic performance.

The principal promotes a nurturing and risk-free environment where teachers feel empowered to try out new approaches that promote high levels of student engagement in each of their classrooms. As a result, relationships across the school are warm, supportive, and inclusive. Students, teachers and parents feel valued, identify with the school and take pride in being a part of the Muscota community.

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.

The principal conducts formal observations and frequent classroom visits to identify and support teachers' professional development needs. As the school increases its data collection and analysis, a focus of the principal has been to ensure that school-wide professional development opportunities are provided for looking at student data regularly in order to refine pedagogical skills of all teachers. A professional development committee comprised of classroom teachers representing all the grades assists the principal with planning highly relevant professional development to improve instruction and assessment practices. In addition, careful planning takes place in order to ensure that differentiated professional development meets the needs of new staff, as well as those of more senior staff. Teachers are also provided with the opportunity to attend off-site workshops that support the school's Design Your Own assessment initiative, progressive education philosophy and the descriptive review method. Teachers from across the grades participate in the inquiry team which has focused its attention on identifying instructional strategies to better support the writing skills of English language learners.

Parents and staff highly value the school's progressive philosophy and the strong emphasis it places on the social and emotional development of all students. As a result, the school community values the established partnerships with outside organizations which assist in accelerating the academic and personal growth of students. Partnerships such as Studio in a School, and the Joyce Theater Dance Company promote the arts, while Harlem Family Institute and Alianza Dominicana provide support services and workshops for parents and students on social-emotional issues.

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 proficient.

The new principal has focused on establishing a culture of using data to inform all planning, setting of goals and evaluating the impact instruction is having on students' progress. Teachers now use data regularly to monitor and evaluate the progress students are making. They meet weekly during grade meetings and assessment periods

to evaluate student work, unit test results, Design Your Own assessments, student conference notes and observations. Teachers review student progress in order to adjust plans, inform instruction and create intervention strategies for individual and small groups of students. Modification of instruction for struggling students occurs in the classroom as teachers conference daily with students and establish guided reading groups in English language arts and focus groups in math. In addition, students requiring further support attend the extended-day program where they received targeted instruction in English language arts and math. The principal's school improvement plans are producing good result as teachers use a combination of both formative and summative data to plan and modify instruction. However, the school's strategic planning process lacks measurable interim goals, and suitable timeframes for meeting short term goals.

As a reflective community the teachers at Muscota have embraced the principal's vision and commitment for school improvement. They attest that under his leadership they have been supported through professional development opportunities to further hone their skills of assessment and data analysis. This has enabled them to use data more effectively to evaluate their instructional practices and impact on student learning. This year the school also identified a need to develop curriculum maps in English language arts and math in order to ensure coherence and alignment of instruction across the grades and to better support the school's model of multi-grade classes. As part of their strategic planning process there is a commitment to continue refining and developing the curriculum maps for next school year in order to incorporate the content areas of science, social studies and the arts.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Muscota New School	△	➤	✓	+
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, 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.

To what extent do ...	△	➤	✓	+
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.

To what extent do school leaders...	△	➤	✓	+
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.

To what extent do ...	△	➤	✓	+
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

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