

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**Manhattan School for Children
Elementary- Middle School 333
154 West 93rd Street
New York
NY 10025**

Principal: Susan Rappaport

Dates of review: May 19 - 20, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Sara Carvajal

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Manhattan School for Children is an elementary-middle school with 695 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 25% Black, 22% Hispanic, 46% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.0%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The principal leads a data-focused site that respects and embraces the diversity of its varied stakeholders without compromising its high expectations for student achievement. In particular, at the forefront of this school is a focus on commonality of students' abilities and the need to address any differences in physical needs. As a result, the inclusion classes are robust with well-prepared support staff, adaptive equipment and assistive technology the norm. It is a site that students believe "really focuses on community and bonding."

Recently, the school has worked arduously to develop its bridge for communicating with families while maintaining students at the core of its work. As a result, the school has successfully transformed the interim progress report and conferencing system into progressive vehicles for high quality conversations that support academic and personal success for all students. At the classroom level, however, all teachers do not yet demonstrate effective use of certain school-wide embedded structures in social studies and science to monitor the interim achievement for sub-groups of students.

Parents declare that the culture of the school encourages them to exercise their voice at various levels of school planning through email as well as personal interactions with the parent coordinator. Parents are equally appreciative of the range of ways that the principal and staff communicate school-wide high expectations efficiently so that they may continually support their children's learning journeys at home. Students have also internalized the school's high expectations for academic and personal success. The curriculum, which includes a rich arts component, enriches the breadth of student achievement during the regular school day as well as through after-school programming.

Using the achievement data as well as informal assessments throughout the year, the principal has implemented several impacting strategic organizational decisions, including the expansion of partnerships with local organizations, to enrich the quality of instruction for all stakeholders. However, the school does not yet manifest an expansive use of technology resources by students across grades to further support tailored instruction that stretches the thinking of higher-achieving students. Similarly, the school does not consistently analyze student work at clearly defined interim checkpoints to clearly conclude the impact of specific professional development on instructional strategies and student achievement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and staff share a clear vision of developing a reflective, data-driven learning community that promotes student achievement through ongoing collaboration with all stakeholders.
- The school has successfully transformed the traditional school report card and conferencing system between staff and families into progressive vehicles for high quality reflection of progress over time to prompt optimal academic and personal success for all students.
- Parents consistently exercise their voice at various levels of school planning to ensure that the students' emotional concerns and academic needs are the central foci of the school.
- The principal and staff effectively communicate school-wide high expectations to parents and students through assorted venues in order to gain the effective support of families in continued school improvement.
- The rich curriculum offers a wide range of rigorous experiences and choice, including the arts, to facilitate students' ownership of learning.
- The principal has made wise strategic organizational and instructional decisions to enhance the school's climate and culture so that deepened student and teacher learning can occur.
- All stakeholders consistently manifest the golden rule that everyone is important in the school community in order to validate the social and academic experiences of all student sub-groups.

What the school needs to improve

- Systematize the use of conference notes in social studies and science to promote increased sub-group analysis by gender at frequent interim checkpoints as it impacts student achievement in these content areas.
- Broaden the availability of technology resources and diverse usage by all students in classrooms to further support differentiation of teaching and learning in order to stretch the thinking of higher-achieving students.
- Embed the consistent scrutiny of student work at clearly defined interim checkpoints as part of each teacher's detailed professional development plan to ensure alignment between professional development, instructional practice and student achievement.

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 well developed.

The principal leads the site with a clear vision for developing a reflective, data-driven learning community. With the steady support of highly focused assistant principals, she periodically collects, organizes and analyzes assessments results for English language arts, math, science and social studies across all grades. The team analyzes the data by grade, class, subgroup, and targeted individual students to identify trends of strength as well as areas for improvement. Consequently, the data is used to develop supplemental instructional programs according to the students' changing needs, which will ultimately impact student achievement. Despite its great momentum and depth in data collection and analysis, the school does not yet demonstrate solid use of conference notes in social studies and science across all grades as a means by which to analyze specific sub-groups within individual classrooms.

This year's expanded inquiry team varies in expertise and is delving deeper in focus with a "vision for math", specifically developing numeracy skills in grade 5 students by strategically introducing different instructional models for problem-solving tasks. The team, including classroom teachers, academic intervention personnel, consultants from its partnership school organization, and the school's leadership team bring a wide array of expertise to the table across the grades. The inquiry team is monitoring effectively the inter-relatedness of attendance data, as well as summative and formative English language arts and math data as the indicators for success. Through professional development sessions, the team has engaged other adult learners in embracing math content and sharing of expectations so these practices are replicated successfully throughout the site.

Another noteworthy aspect of the school shines through its reconstruction of the traditional report card. In contrast with the City-mandated reporting and conferencing system, the principal has successfully revamped the student progress report. A comprehensive narrative report, distributed three times per year, includes specific details of the learning. Thusly, parents and students may reflectively match individual student outcomes against the school's high expectations and rigorous curriculum. Parent-teacher conferences also reflect a progressive break from previously historically limiting interactions between the school and its families. Students are mandated to attend and participate in 40-minute conferences. As a result, students feel that they are at the center of the school's mission, and parents recognize how the site "empowers children" to take responsibility for their learning.

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.

Parents characterize the school as a welcoming environment where they are actively encouraged to contribute ideas to help improve the school. Be it through email or direct interactions with school personnel, all parents unanimously agree that they share an active voice in school-wide planning and decision-making, including the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Parents also continually exercise their highly proactive involvement in all school functions beyond the planning component. As a result, the sense of community at the site continues to flourish, the immaculate facility is expanding to include a greenhouse, and the students openly celebrate how “the school makes you feel like you’re at home”.

Collaborative goal setting between students and their teachers occurs effectively on assorted levels at the site. At the onset of the year, students and their families are systematically engaged in an open forum to identify their “hopes and dreams”, which comprise a balance of annual academic and social goals that are revisited and revised periodically. These loop back to the responsive classroom philosophy of providing students with a learning environment where they feel safe, respected, and excited about learning. During parent-teacher conferences, students and their families sit with teachers to probe the data. In this way, they are able to tailor and revisit efficiently behavioral and academic goals, related to demonstrated student needs. In class, teachers utilize individual conferencing opportunities with students to set specific interim goals across subject areas. On all levels, students are able to articulate their learning goals, and most importantly, they own the learning plans and resources that guide them toward continued success.

The school communicates its high expectations through various communiqués. The monthly principal’s newsletter is supplemented by weekly teacher newsletters that inform parents of the types of instructional activities that are occurring, by academy, grade or class at the school. Consequently, parental support and their deep awareness of children’s learning are steadily increasing throughout the site. Homework packets are also frontloaded weekly in order to support students and their families. As a result, students and parents are able to maximize their time and resources efficiently to complete specific and challenging projects.

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 well developed.

Students and parents alike find that the rigorous and flexible curriculum at the school offers a wide range of experiences and choice for students. The inquiry-driven core curriculum is supplemented by academic intervention opportunities, via the strategically programmed ‘intensives’ tutorial program for all subject areas across the grades. Parents rightly view the program as a “dynamic structure” that “teaches students where they are”, respecting their individual learning strengths and styles. The school also infuses several enrichment opportunities during the regular school day to stretch students’ learning steadily. These include a plethora of arts and sports club

opportunities, the Renzulli web-based resource to support differentiated learning experiences, and periodic school-wide, subject-specific curriculum fairs that foster an aura of competition throughout the site.

Based on a wide range of data, the principal has made effective strategic organizational and instructional decisions throughout the school year to continually upgrade the school for all. For example, she has deliberately restructured science instruction within the primary grades so that teachers and students now benefit from having a push-in science cluster. In this way, classroom teachers are developing their mastery of content knowledge and comfort level with the strategic delivery of the content area through a highly tactile, exploratory approach. Similarly, students benefit from learning the subject content from a highly knowledgeable teacher who demonstrates a real a passion for the material. It is no wonder that some parents have noticed that “science is now glamorous” to their young daughters. The expansion of Renzulli throughout the school is another example of a recently instituted strategic leadership decision. After having analyzed the positive impact of the web-based resource on differentiation of instruction and student writing pieces in grade 4 social studies, the school is utilizing the budget to upgrade the site license to include parent access and to add a dedicated position to optimize the effective use of the resource by students, parents and faculty.

A high priority of this school is the manifestation of the principal’s golden rule that everyone is important in the school community. Based on the philosophy that “in a community, you have diverse abilities”, the principal has made inclusion a high priority. The school is sensitizing all stakeholders in understanding and embracing cultural, social and physical differences. For instance, students who live with severe physical limitations are mainstreamed and appreciated. Moreover, all students who require additional resources are consistently provided with them, thereby empowering them to integrate successfully into all aspects of school life.

The differentiation of instruction for individual students is observed in the vast majority of classes through tiered products, purposeful groupings for either intervention or enrichment, and varied content, all well matched to support students according to their specific needs. However, the school does not currently demonstrate that it offers broad availability of hardware technology resources for use by all students in classrooms to challenge them to become higher achieving students.

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 well developed.

This year, the school has effectively utilized its expansive inquiry team as the catalyst for replicating data gathering and analysis to impact significantly on the school-wide approach to improving math instruction. Consequently, students and teachers are gaining confidence with the subject matter, as evidenced by results on ongoing formative and summative assessments. Additional collaborative professional development opportunities at the site include weekly grade-team meetings, lab sites for structured and informal intervisitation between teachers, and the videotaping of in-house best practices. Each of these venues prompts both self- and peer-reflection that generate warm and cool feedback to teachers so that they may refine their craft in a continuous cycle of improvement. Furthermore, school leaders are able to use this data in order to delve into deep conversations with individual teachers regarding their respective professional development needs and customized learning plans as they evolve systematically throughout the school year.

Despite the focus, range and frequency of professional development opportunities, the school does not consistently demonstrate how it employs the scrutiny of student work at interim points during the school year to measure the impact of teachers' learning and introduction of newly learned instructional strategies on student achievement across all subject areas.

Partnerships with community-based organizations abound to "equalize the playing field" for the diverse adults and students at the school. The school has established profitable relationships with several entities, including the Center for Education Intervention, Sunworks, Wellness in the Schools and the Lincoln Center Institute. These very distinct collaborations assist the site in building teacher capacity and student learning by supporting instruction beyond the school day. As a result, the school is successfully engaging in completing monumental projects that enrich the lives of teachers and students, such as a paradigm shift in math instruction, the construction of a new greenhouse at the site, and providing digital photography instruction that supports architecture study.

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 well developed.

The principal's vision to develop further the school as a site where "whatever we do for children we do for all children" is fully embraced by all constituents. Students undoubtedly recognize that the respect for diversity continuously demonstrated by the adults in the school is trickling down to them. As a result, there is an aura of sensitivity, trust and teamwork that leads to the collective success of the school, as evidenced by student achievement as well as improved safety data.

Students across the grades spiral back to their balance of social and academic goals as often and deeply as their teachers reflect on their professional growth and administrators ponder the acquisition of the school-wide goals. As a result, this practice of modifying and revising goals, plans and strategies has evolved into a natural exercise within the whole school community that is leading to highly focused teaching and learning throughout the site.

The precise reflections revealed in the pre-review school self-evaluation demonstrate a strong ability of the leadership team to visualize and plan strategically for continued school improvement. Using a wide range of data, the team has worked well together to construct a critical view of the school's current data trends, resources and practices. Moreover, the team has adeptly identified the most sensible steps the school needs to take to drive the next stage of further improving student outcomes.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Manhattan School for Children	△	▷	✓	+
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

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