

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Hudson River Middle School

Middle School 289

**201 Warren Street
New York
NY 10282**

Principal: Ellen Foote

Dates of review: December 7 – 8, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Daria Rigney

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

MS 289 is a middle school with 298 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 12% Black, 16% Hispanic, 31% White, and 40% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 97%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Dynamic and thoughtful, the principal continuously evaluates the effectiveness of the school's instructional approaches, realigning resources, reconfiguring teacher teams and researching innovative ways to improve the school. Her clearly articulated vision of learning provides a rich foundation for seamless pedagogical practice with the goal of creating learners who are self-reliant and independent thinkers as well as flexible, collaborative team members. The school's work in consolidating skills and standards with substantive project work contributes a complex, ambitious and implemented school mission.

Data from a multitude of sources is gathered on an ongoing basis including the school's periodic assessments, portfolio artifacts, classroom observations and homework samples. The principal and assistant principal scrutinize all data and analyze them for useful information on trends, patterns and anomalies in student achievement providing teachers with both the data and the means for analysis of student work. However, at this time, information about curricula and student achievement is not shared with parents consistently across the school.

The school's beliefs about the importance of independence and choice inform goal setting across the grades manifesting itself in a complex and specific array of rubrics in all subject areas. The staff's work with Schools Attuned has equipped teachers with a deeper understanding of the importance of observing students in class and analyzing student work. The principal routinely assesses students' portfolios and the quality of conversations in class. However, teachers do not set interim goals in their day-to-day classroom instruction.

There are multiple leadership opportunities, formal and informal, for teachers in curricular, instructional and extracurricular areas. The entire staff meets weekly with agendas that vary from whole school initiatives to teacher team planning in specific study topics. All are engaged in collaborative inquiry, on both grade levels and in subject areas, focused mainly on improving learning outcomes for students who need additional support. However, teachers do not use these collaborations to design adjustments in their teaching practice.

The culture of revising its own assumptions is deeply embedded in the school as evidenced by the ongoing work in science curriculum, report cards, design your own assessments and parent teacher conferences.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and the staff have developed rich curricular experiences for students that focus on critical thinking and research skills in order to generate and sustain independent learning.
 - A project on the Constitution in Grade 8 Social Studies required students to write a bill and debate it before a moot court enabling students to develop logical arguments and practice public speaking before peers and faculty.
 - A project on Slavery in Grade 7 required students to read slave narratives and compose their own stories, which served to develop students' research skills in a variety of sources. One student explained that the project, "taught me more than slavery...it taught me about race, about power among people...it wasn't just historical and it wasn't simple."
- The principal sets a high value on teacher collaboration providing multiple opportunities for teachers to plan lessons together and discuss common pedagogical practices
 - The school has a long-standing tradition of the staff meeting weekly, after school on Wednesdays, in a variety of configurations (whole staff, small groups, grade teams) in order to address curricular and instructional issues. This allows for frequent teacher input and multiple opportunities for flexible partnerships and groups to form among the staff. It also gives the staff time to develop common language and values in implementing practice across all content areas in grades providing school-wide congruence in the delivery of lessons for students.
 - Grades and Subject area teachers meet once per week. Teachers use these meetings for a variety of purposes: curriculum planning, analyzing student work, creating rubrics, discussing students who need additional supports and generating before school and after school groups to support students in completing their projects.
- The principal and teacher teams consistently collect and analyze a wide array of data from both summative and formative assessments in order to respond to students' academic needs and mobilize resources that enhance academic achievement.
 - The principal routinely collects and examines portfolios of student work, in order to determine how students are progressing in specific curricular areas so that she can support staff in meeting student needs.
 - Administrators and staff have done a thorough examination of multiple sources of data from Item Skills Analysis to Design Your Own assessments in order to determine the supports and challenges necessary to effectively raise student achievement levels. This level of collection and analysis led the school to an understanding of students'

mastery of document-based questions and their need for support in multiple-choice questions thus adjusting the curriculum accordingly.

- The principal and teacher teams generate flexible and dynamic tools for capturing critical information about students' levels of knowledge and skills in a variety of content areas, as well as study habits.
 - The principal and assistant principal created and compiled a spreadsheet of student grades in a variety of areas in order to efficiently analyze students' progress. This enables school leaders and teachers to examine achievement among individuals as well as specific groups, classes and grades providing a foundation for implementing supports and challenges for differentiated learning.
 - The school has developed an observation tool for actively seeking and collecting information on student discourse. This tool is used by teachers as they visit each other's classrooms and research students' understanding of concepts and articulation of ideas, enabling them to extrapolate from their own data and expand their understanding of student achievement.
- There is a compelling "theory of action" that is fundamental to the school's instructional approach and pedagogical methods and ensures an alignment among administrators and teachers in the school.
 - The principal and teachers can clearly articulate their values and the mission of the school as "developing intellectual habits of mind that lead students to make well-thought-out choices and independent decisions", making the setting of individual goals the ultimate outcome for students. All of the school's projects, rubrics and assessments are effectively aligned with this belief system.
 - Students are able to speak eloquently about their building their own theories from their ideas. "It isn't enough to have an idea" explained a 6th grader, "you have to make connections and understand how it relates to a bigger idea...one object teaches you so much...we learn to see a lot in a little here."
- The school has expanded its capacity to work with students who present challenging academic profiles, strengthening teachers' repertory of strategies in providing rich learning opportunities for all children both during the school day and after school
 - The school has worked with Schools Attuned for the last couple of years. This has provided the staff with small-group training understanding the wide variety of learning approaches presented by students while enabling them to refine teaching practices that meet the needs of all students.
 - A long-standing partnership with Manhattan Youth provides a rich and varied array of academic, athletic and arts activities in a neighborhood setting to enhance students' learning. This includes study lab supports, robotics, soccer, wrestling, swimming, yoga and instrumental music.

- The principal closely monitors the impact of all curricular and instructional decisions and consistently evaluates their effectiveness in improving outcomes for students.
 - The principal is a dedicated researcher of her school's practice, constantly looking for evidence of the impact of curricular and instructional decisions. This past year, she revamped teachers' use of professional periods by assigning groups of 8-15 students to teachers for specific support in organizational skills as well as for extra help in both literacy and math projects. She created subject based teams of teachers to teach special education students in order to boost students' content knowledge.
 - Faced with the loss of her art room and the specter of a small space for art, she re-programmed the school to provide a rich studio art experience for half classes.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop consistent and dependable methods for communicating instructional goals, pedagogical methods and student progress with parents in order to ensure their active, knowledgeable participation in the children's education.
 - Although parents appreciate the rigorous assignments of the school and can reference notebooks and portfolio assessments as important indicators of student progress, they do not have access to detailed curricula in all subject areas, requirements of project work or homework assignments.
 - While parents are grateful for emails from teachers, there is not a consistent practice or routine in place for parents to communicate with teachers. Although parents are asked to meet with a "core" teacher for parent teacher conferences, they do not have access to all subject teachers who have contact with their child. This limits their ability to understand their child's strengths and challenges in a variety of contexts and through each teacher's understanding.
- Deepen and expand teachers' understanding of the connection between data collection and analysis and setting interim goals for students at the classroom level in order to effectively differentiate teaching and accelerate learning for all students.
 - Although assignments and projects are engaging and thoughtful presently teachers are not consistently using formative assessments on an ongoing basis to help them understand what students know and are able to do as they work on whole-class assignments. As a result, student's next steps are not clearly defined preventing them from moving to the next step in their mastery of a skill or concept.
- Extend the use of professional collaborations, specifically collaborative inquiry teams, to include protocols that promote shared leadership and improved student learning.

- While teachers meet and discuss individual students, analyzing student work and assessment data with the goal of improving student outcomes, they do not identify groups of students with similar needs in order to generate adjustments to curriculum, instruction or assessments on a school wide basis. As a result, their work has limited impact on teacher practice across the school.
- Although the work of teacher teams is broadly aligned to school goals, it is not tightly integrated into the school's mission. Teachers do not consistently adhere to an agenda or protocol for supporting their inquiry and deepening their knowledge about content or pedagogy.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Hudson River Middle School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				X
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X			
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...?</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	▶	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed