Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Irwin Altman Middle School 172
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 26Q172

81-14 257 Street
Queens
NY 11004

Principal: Jeffrey Slivko

Dates of Review:
February 6, 2018 - February 7, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Elsa Kortright-Torres
The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

**Information about the School**

Irwin Altman Middle School 172 serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

**School Quality Ratings**

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
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### Systems for Improvement

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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings
Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula, instructional shifts, and the articulated belief that students learn best when they are actively engaged in meaningful discussions, and by making student thinking visible using graphic organizers and writing across all subject areas. Across classrooms, students are engaged in discussions to share their thinking and collaborate with peers.

Impact
Across classrooms, instructional practices result in high levels of student engagement and critical thinking reflected in student work.

Supporting Evidence

- School leadership shares an articulated belief that students learn best when teachers provide opportunities for student discussions in groups using literacy across content areas with a balance of informational and narrative texts. Teachers interviewed shared the same belief regarding student learning and emphasized the use of academic vocabulary and a focus on writing using a writer’s workshop model. In a social studies class, a teacher used pictures of ancient Egypt artifacts for students to analyze their purpose and characteristics using academic vocabulary such as government, social hierarchy, and religion and wonderings of ancient Egyptian civilization. Students shared their thinking using their graphic organizer. For example, one student wrote, “Why were the servants of the pharaoh not buried with him?” Another student wrote that the purpose of the illustration, “A Poem on Papyrus”, was to tell a story.

- Across classrooms and subject areas, teachers use a multi-disciplinary approach to make learning meaningful for students and to integrate writing across subject areas. For example, teachers integrate English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies and provide opportunities for analyzing text and writing about topics that relate to each other. In a social studies lesson, students analyzed primary documents to determine characters from ancient civilization. Students organized their thoughts and observations using a graphic organizer. In a science classroom, students calculated the density of different samples of matter to identify an object and provide scientific evidence to support a claim. The teacher used King Hiero’s story and the Gold Rush to stimulate student thinking to find the gold object and provide evidence for their claim.

- Across classrooms, students engage in discussion and collaboration. In a math classroom, students worked on graphing a step function called the greatest integer function. The teacher provided an opportunity for students to work in groups to graph the integer function. In a social studies classroom, groups of students conducted a gallery walk using a Question Formulation Technique to gain knowledge on world religions. For example, in one group, students analyzed different religious symbols and one student asked his group members, “How do they come up with the different symbols?” They engaged in a discussion and then wrote down their thoughts on a post-it note. Students left questions at each station about each resource and, a group leader to be responsible for ensuring discussions are on topic.
Findings

Whereas the majority of teachers meet in content-based teams, only a few teams are engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations. Additionally, distributive leadership structures are developing.

Impact

While some teachers have assumed leadership of their department teams, they do not yet have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly for team planning and are starting to use an inquiry approach to improve student learning. The Spanish team met to discuss adjective and noun agreement. In addition, these teachers discussed student confusion of adjectives and noun agreement as well as different forms of the verb to be. Using student work, teachers analyzed students' areas of need and shared instructional strategies as next steps. Although these meetings have taken place to look at student work and plan future lessons, they have yet to conduct inquiry or identify a problem of practice, hindering opportunities to strengthen instructional capacity across the school.

- Teachers analyze student work in Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings following a six-week calendar cycle. The eighth-grade and sixth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) team has met twice. The seventh- and eighth-grade social studies team has met twice and identified student areas for growth such as citing sources. The math department met in November to discuss addition and subtraction of integers. While the teams have met and analyzed student work, teachers have not identified a problem of practice and there is no evidence of a change in instructional practices to improve student learning. The inquiry approach is inconsistently used throughout the school and has yet to have an impact on instructional decisions that promote the achievement of school goals.

- The Spanish seventh- and eighth-grade team meets and their meetings are facilitated by one teacher who has assumed a leadership role and serves as the team's liaison. There is no evidence of distributive leadership in other subject areas. Teachers reported that their voice is not considered in key decisions that affect student learning including adoption of curricula and resource materials. Distributive leadership structures are limited and have not influenced decisions that affect student learning across the school.
Findings
Across classrooms, lesson plans incorporate the Common Core Learning Standards and integration of the instructional shifts with an emphasis on real-world applications and making thinking visible across grades and groups of students.

Impact
Coherent curricula across grades and subjects are designed to promote college and career readiness for all students and ensure that all learners are engaged in tasks requiring higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Lessons plans from a variety of subjects and grade levels are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. One social studies sixth-grade lesson addresses standards such as, citing sources, and collaborative discussions. A seventh-grade ELA lesson focuses on citing several pieces of textual evidence and writing informative or explanatory texts. In a sixth-grade math unit plan on ratios and proportions, teachers plan units including math standards: finding a percent of a quantity, solving problems involving finding a whole given a part, and the percent, as well as using modeling as a strategy. In another seventh-grade math unit on expressions and equations, students apply geometry concepts such as finding perimeter and circumference to solve real-world problems. In a science geology unit, unit plans and lessons evidence modeling to build prior knowledge to describe, predict, and design systems of cycling of Earth’s materials and the flow of energy.

- In lesson plans and curriculum pacing guides, there is an emphasis on the instructional shifts. For example, in a sixth-grade ELA unit plan, one of the tasks requires students to identify character traits and use supporting evidence in a specific essay structure. In a seventh-grade ELA unit plan, students analyze an artifact to understand the causes of the American Revolution using academic vocabulary. In a sixth-grade math unit on ratios and proportions, teachers list possible misconceptions to build coherence and address foundational skills needed to master new ones.

- Lesson plans across all subjects and grade levels evidence rigorous habits in academic tasks for all students including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. Habits as follow are explicitly embedded in academic tasks: showing respectful discourse, problem solving, making a visual representation of student thinking, creating, taking and supporting a position, metacognition, and questioning. Among some of the scaffolds used for ELLs and students with disabilities are: modified images using the four-square model, chunking of text, discussion prompts, illustrations, graphic organizers, choice of topics, and checklists.
Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:** 2.2 Assessment  
**Rating:** Proficient

**Findings**
Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics, pre- and post-assessments, self- and peer-assessments, and actionable feedback aligned to the school’s curricula. Teaching practices consistently reflect ongoing use of checks for understanding.

**Impact**
Teachers adjust instructional practices and lesson plans and provide actionable feedback to meet the needs of all students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across classrooms, teachers used entrance tickets and checklists to meet student-learning needs. During an eighth-grade math lesson, students graphed a step function as an entrance ticket. The teacher asked, “What do the inequalities represent?” He said, “We need boundaries. What are the steps?” Seeing that students were confused, he said, “The steps are our function for a specific domain”, as he wrote on the board to clarify. In a seventh-grade English class, the teacher provided a checklist for students to select which grade-level work they wanted to focus on when writing a narrative chapter of a companion book. For example, a student used the eighth-grade checklist after the teacher discussed the rubric to help students select which level, seventh or eighth, to select. The student said, “We could either do a seventh-grade narrative essay or grade eight; I picked eight because I know the big idea and we discussed my pre-writing task.”

- In most classrooms, teachers use rubrics and actionable feedback to help students with next steps. In the small-group student meeting, students shared that they use rubrics and receive feedback from their teachers on their work. One student said, “My teacher said that my conflict was not clear in my narrative writing and that it needed to be interesting. It helped me state my conflict more clearly.” Another student shared that his teacher gave him a rubric before the assignment: “I had the rubric before the assignment and I could check if I had everything in the rubric.” In a rubric used by a teacher to grade an assignment, the teacher wrote as a next step, “Use more evidence! Use parenthetical citation of author’s name. In addition to giving the title of the source and quoting.” In a seventh-grade ELA class, the teacher conferred with students giving them actionable feedback. For example, she said to use different colored sticky notes for each chapter and rank your evidence within each chapter. Students stated that the teacher helped them pick appropriate titles for the companion book based on evidence they collected.

- In an eighth-grade class, the teacher circulated around the room to check for student understanding. He then paused to clarify a misconception and asked the class, “Do we agree with that?” Seeing that students needed clarification, he explained graphing the greatest function by having a student come up and explain her thinking. In an eighth-grade Integrated Co-Teaching social studies class, students used a graphic organizer about the Great Migration. The teacher used questioning such as, “What is the solution for a man with a wife and kids?”, to check for understanding using different scenarios that African Americans went through during the Great Migration. Follow-up was, “What would you need?” Students answered that “the man would need to find a job and that might be hard because the man and his wife just moved and may not know anyone.” A class discussion about finding a job in a new place where no one knows anyone ensued to further their understanding.
Findings
School leaders provide support and consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and learning as well as college and career readiness with faculty, parents, and students.

Impact
Professional learning and a system of accountability support the achievement of high expectations communicated to staff. Structures are in place to help families understand student progress toward high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and learning to the staff and provide training aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* rubric. This year the instructional focus is designing coherent instruction and engaging students in learning which is stated in the faculty handbook and aligned to the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) goals for the 2017-2018 school year. In the beginning of the school year, school leaders listed the areas of focus in their professional learning calendar as: “Rigor (Task and Curriculum Alignment to Standards) and Relevance” and “Grade/Subject Coherence (Team Planning and Inquiry)”. As evidenced in weekly bulletins, teachers are reminded of the instructional focus and professional learning opportunities such as, “Professional Learning-Rigor and Relevance III/Curricular Planning” as part of a series of learning opportunities, offered on a Monday in December. In another professional learning opportunity in November, teachers worked on integrating writer’s workshop with the social studies curriculum. School leaders share best practices to be rated effective in each of the rubric domains. For example, in the January Principal’s Weekly, the principal reminded staff of the effective attributes for planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities.

- Using an observation cycle, school leaders hold teachers accountable for having high expectations, and provide appropriate professional support. School leaders specifically provide verbal and written feedback that speaks to the schools’ areas of focus. For example, one school leader after reflecting about the lesson with the teacher wrote, “By conferring with individual students, you were able to ask questions and provide important feedback to support their learning. This element of your lesson (conferring with students) aligns with our schoolwide instructional focus.” Another school leader provided the following feedback, “Toward increasing both the rigor and relevance of the lesson and the task, consider that the social studies program provides additional teacher materials that include essential questions for each unit that would provide multiple perspectives and foster historical thinking.”

- Through the use of various online platforms such as PupilPath and Google Classroom, teachers and school leaders consistently communicate expectations that are connected to college and career readiness and to help families understand student progress toward achieving academic standards. In the parent meeting, one parent stated, “the school communicates well with us about getting our kids ready for college and has many opportunities for us to come and hear information.” All parents agreed that the school communicates high expectations by teachers posting videos, assignment criteria, and by quickly answering emails with any questions regarding student progress. Another parent stated, and all agreed, that the “Tuesdays Open Conference” time gives them an opportunity to come in and speak with any teacher regarding their children and how they are doing in class.
**Additional Finding**

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders support teacher development with frequent observations and classroom visits with immediate personalized written and verbal feedback that include next steps. School leaders support the development of teachers by reflecting on student work in classrooms.

**Impact**

Formal and informal feedback to teachers promotes reflective practices, supports teacher development and professional growth.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A review of observation reports of teachers reflects frequent cycles of observations with analysis of student work to inform feedback and next steps. For example, in one observation report, the school leader wrote feedback about students being engaged in listing character traits that emphasized their motivations and obstacles using a double bubble thinking map. The teacher received an effective rating of effective in the student engagement component. The same teacher was observed again and received a highly effective rating in the same component in the second observation. The school leader wrote in her observation report that all students were intellectually engaged because of their responses about democracy; they had to refer to their annotated text to justify their claims. Another teacher spoke about the timeliness of the feedback she had received about using Socratic seminars effectively and how that helped her to reflect on her use of seminars with her class. Frequent cycles of observations reflect an improvement of ratings, raising opportunities for student engagement and supporting teacher development.

- School leaders observe teachers regularly and provide actionable feedback with a specific lens related to two areas: designing coherent instruction, and engaging students in learning. For example, one school leader stated in the observation report of an ELA lesson to help students engage cognitively in a writing activity, “please use the suggested timeframe during future lessons: concise mini-lesson (10 minutes), independent work component (20-25 minutes), share (5-7 minutes).” Another teacher received the following feedback on a social studies lesson to enhance the use of the Socratic seminar, “One example of how to ensure all students are ready to participate in a Socratic seminar could be a pre-seminar student checklist that includes criteria items such as a compilation of previously annotated documents.” The teacher advanced from effective in September to highly effective in December for engaging students in learning.

- Teachers receive actionable feedback based on the instructional focus of the school which includes increasing opportunities for student engagement with challenging and complex tasks. For example, in a math lesson, the school leader provided the following feedback, “when asking each group questions about their precision of language in presenting their solution algorithm, give an exemplar and ask for a low-stakes alternate process presentation to clarify your objective of moving past justification for one line of inquiry.” In a science lesson on exploring different forms of energy and how they are important to everyday life, a school leader wrote, “students should choose and generate a graphic organizer to fit their need, rather than providing one thinking map.”