



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Isaac Newton Middle School for Math and Science

Intermediate School 825

**260 Pleasant Avenue
New York
NY 10029**

Principal: Lisa Nelson

Dates of review: January 24 - 25, 2007

Reviewer: Georgie Beasley

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Isaac Newton Middle School for Math and Science has around 350 students enrolled from grade 6 through 8. The school's population comprises 71% Hispanic students, which is much greater than in other City schools, 26% Black students and 3% students from other backgrounds. The proportion of English language learners is 13.1% which is about the same as other City schools. However, a majority of students speak Spanish in addition to English at home. Eleven percent of the school's population is special education students. This is a slightly smaller proportion than typically found in similar schools. The school receives Title 1 funding. Attendance is about 93% which is above that of similar and City schools.

The school has been subject to some changes resulting in unstable staffing, including four principals in as many years. The current principal has built a more stable staff and has enrolled grade 6 students for the first time in September 2006. This means grade 6 and 7 students are new to the school this academic year and grade 8 students are the only group to have been at the school for longer than a year.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has a welcoming atmosphere where everyone is valued for the contribution they make.
- The principal, supported by the assistant principal and staff team, has established a positive learning climate.
- The principal, assistant principal and teachers know students personally and take the time to listen to any concerns.
- Students behave well and move around the building calmly and safely.
- Teachers are very skilful at planning lessons that engage students' interest.
- Classroom environments are well organized, celebrate achievement and contain clear prompts for learning.
- The school gives a strong emphasis to personal development so students are confident and have good social skills.
- The humanities team works together very effectively.
- Communication with parents is very good so they are supportive and proud of the school.
- Attendance and punctuality are monitored closely.

What the school needs to improve

- Gather, analyze and compare data to gain a clearer understanding of what each class, grade and different student group know and are able to do.
- Use the analysis to identify measurable school goals which drive everyone's work to accelerate student progress.
- Raise expectations of what students will achieve at the end of each year by setting measurable goals in English, math, science and social studies.
- Focus discussions in team meetings on the performance and progress of targeted groups of students, especially special education students and those at risk of not reaching their goals.
- Use outcomes from discussions and classroom visits to monitor and review the school's goals and make any adjustments required to accelerate student progress

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with some proficient aspects.

Since her appointment last year, the principal has worked with the assistant principal and staff to successfully establish a welcoming atmosphere in school and a positive climate for learning where staff, students and parents feel valued. Students respond to the respectful approach displayed by staff and so behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. The principal, assistant principal and all staff go out of their way and take time to listen to students' concerns and opinions so students feel part of the school community. The strong focus on students' personal development has enabled the school to set up a supportive climate on which to build learning.

Teachers' dedication and commitment to plan and deliver classes that engage students fully and capture their interest are evident in the wide range of methods and varied range of resources used. Partnerships with parents are strong. Parents like the school's open door policy and value being able to talk to teachers and the administration whenever they wish, within reason. They are kept fully informed about how well their children are doing and so are supportive. The school is now ready to build on this positive start by setting goals that are based on a full range of data and are measured by the success of its students, both personally and academically.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school has sufficient assessment data of its own to build up a secure understanding of what each student knows and can do. The information is used well by teachers to plan instruction that meets the needs of students in their classes. However, the school has not as yet started to analyze a range of data with enough rigor, mainly because of errors in the information from State and City tests. As a result, it has not built up a comprehensive picture of what different groups of students know and are able to do. It does not therefore have a secure enough understanding of the performance and progress of different classes and grades across the school, and the achievement of special education students, English language learners, students from different ethnic groupings, and boys and girls in particular as groups of learners. The school uses data from its own assessments proficiently to plan intervention programs in class. Teachers use what is available and information from their own assessments as a basis for their planning to build each student's learning step by step.

The school is beginning to build up an assessment history for each student in school. This is starting to create a clearer picture of each student's progress. As yet, the information is not available in a format that gives a quick overview of the school's performance. Consequently, the school does not evaluate progress nor compare how well it is

performing with similar schools, to previous years, class by class, grade by grade, across subjects and for the different groupings within school. Data is used proficiently to identify which special education students and English language learners would benefit from extra 'push in' and 'pull out' support, and teachers encourage those students close to the next level to attend the extended day sessions for one to one and group tutoring. The humanities coach uses data effectively to lead improvements in English language arts and social studies.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

There is a strong commitment and focus throughout the school on improving students' performance and progress. During team meetings discussions are open and honest about how well the school is progressing towards achieving its goals. However, goals so far have focused on setting up a positive climate for learning and, while these have been successful, there has not been enough focus on using data to set measurable goals in terms of student performance and progress. As a result, the school was surprised to find that some students did not do so well in State and City tests as they expected them to. The school is now ready to put together goals that are measured for success by student's overall performance and progress. However, because these are not in place, the school has a subjective view of how well different groups of students are doing in class. While individual teachers have small step goals for individual students to achieve in class, the lack of long-term measurable goals for students' achievement at the end of each year does not enable the school to monitor whether students are making the progress they should to reach expected levels.

Suitable attention is given to improving the performance and progress of English language learners, special education students and those identified by teachers who would benefit from some extra help to reach the expected level. Data is used to identify which students would benefit from small group instruction and regular discussions between the humanities coach and English as a second language teacher ensures that learning in class is supported at these times.

Parents are given good information about how well their children are doing and how they can help at home through regular consultation opportunities and PTA functions. The school's 'open door' policy enables parents to talk to teachers at any time. Parents value the time teachers give to help individual students in school and with homework after school.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has a clear curriculum map that makes sure all students receive their entitlement. English and social studies are planned well through regular collaborative

meetings with teachers in the humanities department. The coach leads these meetings and teachers' planning for differentiated instruction very well and so they are clearly focused on student performance and progress. Open and honest discussions about performance in both subjects often lead to adjustments in the curriculum and ways to make instruction more engaging. At some meetings, teachers analyze students' work which helps them to check their understanding of what constitutes an assessment level. As a result, teachers plan units of study that address identified gaps in learning. Additional intervention programs give good support to helping students to develop reading and writing skills. Teachers generally provide assistance after school to students who need more help in math because 'pull out' and 'push in' sessions do not always specifically tackle weaknesses in this subject.

Teachers use a proficient range of assessment data of their own to guide planning and to make sure that the level of work meets the broad range of students' needs. At grade and faculty meetings, teachers focus discussions on how to vary teaching methods and learning styles to plan lessons that engage and interest students. For example, computers are used for research and presentation of projects, practical scientific investigations are frequently planned, role-play brings the history aspect of social studies to life and field trips enable students to learn from first hand sources. The mathematics teachers have used the Princeton Review data, which provides useful information about individual student's specific knowledge, understanding and skills. They use the information proficiently to plan learning that helps students build on previous learning.

The school's budgeting and scheduling decisions address students' needs through common planning time, purchasing necessary materials, and employing effective personnel to provide the support necessary to ensure the students' success. This is evidenced by the excellent tone throughout the school, by students' good behavior in class and positive commitment to complete work. Students report that they feel comfortable about approaching teachers when they have a problem or need help with school work. They particularly value the time teachers give to listening to them. Good systems are in place to manage and monitor attendance and punctuality.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has selected her staff with care to make sure they share her vision for students' learning. This has resulted in a consistently positive approach to the way students are guided and the welcoming learning environments created in almost every classroom. Teachers' commitment to improving each student's performance and progress is evident in the way they give up time to help them with work that they find difficult, both during and after school. They use their own assessment data to develop and revise plans but, as yet, are not comparing outcomes closely enough across classes and other schools.

Professional development has been planned based on the principal's vision for teaching and learning and this has resulted in the positive climate found throughout the school. Meetings of humanities teachers are models of good practice and make a significant contribution to the professional development of the teachers involved. The school's assessment data has been aligned with the levels that students reached in City tests in humanities subjects and so English and social studies teachers know how to use the data

to monitor progress. Teachers talk openly about their own practice and share ideas through discussion and visiting each others' classes.

The principal does not visit classes as much as she would like to and the focus has not been on how well programs support the school's long term goals based on data because these are not yet in place. However, visits to monitor the effectiveness of professional development and follow-up discussions have established well organized and welcoming classroom environments that support learning effectively.

The principal is respected by staff, parents and students and has brought about successful change in the schools climate since she has been appointed. The school runs smoothly because systems and scheduling have now been put in place. These are constantly reviewed to ensure they are efficient and supportive of learning. Partnership with outside bodies enrich the school's instruction, for example, university staff make a valuable contribution to teachers' professional development and to the work of the math team.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school has made a good start in putting systems in place to review and evaluate how scheduling and instruction gives students the support they need to learn. Its goals for the principal's first year established its working culture and pulled everyone together to strive for the same things. The goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan are however too broad to guide student performance and progress. Goals are not measurable and tend to focus on what the school intends to do rather than on what it aims to achieve. Staff and parents are involved in setting goals in leadership group meetings but this is not yet fully established because the system of review is new and only in its first year. Goals are reviewed at administration and faculty meetings but the lack of interim goals for student performance prevents an objective and more rigorous evaluation. The assistant principal plays a pivotal role in ensuring professional development is planned to meet the goals and that visits to classrooms focus on the outcomes. However, minutes of meetings are not kept and so the detail of whether goals have been met is missing.

Discussions about performance and progress in grade team meetings focus on three students, chosen because they are representative of the class. While data is used during these discussions to focus the meeting, there is too little opportunity to extend this group to include discussions about different groupings including the progress of boys and girls, of different ethnic groups, special education students, English language learners, students who may be slipping back or those who could be given an added push to move up a level. The humanities team evaluates how well things are going in English and social studies well because they use their own assessment data and those gained from City and State tests to guide their discussions about progress and subsequent suitable learning programs.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Isaac Newton Middle School for Math and Science (IS 825)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score	X		
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 	X		
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1	X		

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.	X		
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.	X		
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2	X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	Ø	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	Ø	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.	X		
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	Ø	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.	X		
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5	X		