

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

Irwin Altman Middle School

Middle School Q172

**81-14 257th Street
Queens
NY 11004**

Principal: Jeffrey Slivko

Dates of review: October 21-22, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Anita E. Saunders

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Irwin Altman is a middle school with 1,028 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 12% Black, 15% Hispanic, 17% White, and 55% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 96.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal makes purposeful organizational decisions highly supportive of the school's focus on improving student outcomes.
 - Hiring practices by the principal include an interview, a demonstration lesson and a follow up conference to ensure the knowledge and practices of the candidate are aligned with student needs and the long range instructional goals of the school. Three integrated collaborative teaching classes provide three weekly small group sessions for students with individual education plans to ensure increased student learning and achievement. The English as a second language (ESL) program has been restructured to allow the ESL teacher time to plan with classroom teachers. Therefore, the ESL teacher pushes in to work with students and then aligns the direct instruction provided during pull out sessions resulting in differentiation based on students' levels. The reorganization of the 8th grade team to better address student progress concerns has led to improvements in student outcomes.
 - A school-based option was received for three half days of professional development, enabling staff to continue their integration of the Core Curriculum State Standards and creating challenging academic tasks which embed higher order thinking skills. Each teacher now has two common preparation periods with his/her grade and department colleagues, to align curriculum goals and improve instructional practices.
- The school has created a strong, coherent curriculum that connects horizontally and vertically across grades and subjects, supporting learning at all levels.
 - In 2009-2010, an interdisciplinary team of content area teachers formed a study group to learn about transformative assessment that resulted in the deconstruction of the State standards and the incorporation of formative assessment into all content area essential learning outcomes. Units of study were revised to include detailed curriculum maps and pacing calendars focused on differentiation so all students are challenged with high expectations to close the achievement gap. This year teams were reorganized horizontally by grade and department to further support collaborative planning, teaching and learning outcomes for all students. Instructional coherence was established across grades in every department as evidenced in the effective use of graphic organizers and diagrams that have impacted on how students organize and focus their learning.
- The school has a coherent set of beliefs on students' learning that leads to high levels of engagement and increase student achievement.
 - As noted by the principal, "Students learn best in an environment that recognizes their interests, readiness and learning styles, that includes a rigorous, coherent curricula that incorporates critical thinking skills and active engagement." Teaching practices are aligned by grade, content standards and outcomes throughout the school. There are high levels of student engagement in every classroom with differentiated assignments based on student ability and interest. Students are given options in how to work in their groups and various ways of documenting answers, as well as the use of technology. Displays of student work highlight choice in product representation such as power point

presentations, topographic and physical maps, and individual and small group radio broadcasts. Students state, "Teachers do a good job allowing us to work in different groups on different things that interest us at different times."

- School leaders and faculty gather a wide range of relevant data across all subjects to identify trends, strengths and areas of need at the school level resulting in goal setting, planning and implementation of practices.
 - Analysis of multiple data, teacher observations, student work, and referrals, have identified students with disabilities, English language learners, Hispanic children, and high achieving students, as those in need of additional supports to accelerate progress. High achievers are tracked to ensure instruction is accelerated, e.g. Regents Algebra and Earth Science. Inquiry teams use an action plan with interim and long range goals for low performing students with focused strategies and baseline assessments per student for each unit of study. As a result, the principal and core inquiry team are able to effectively track students' progress, including the use of an individualized computer program, and make recommendations for appropriate lessons using alternative strategies and differentiated assignments during the regular and extended day programs. Additionally, academic intervention services are provided to low achieving students and accelerated curriculum expectations challenge higher achieving students with innovative projects and higher level thinking.
- The staff and leadership have created clear, focused school level goals and action plans to ensure college and career readiness.
 - The performance and progress of the No Child Left Behind initiative identifies that students with disabilities, English language learners and high achievers are in need of further improvement. As a result, the staff concentrates on differentiation of instruction, the Common Core State Standards, formative assessments, and small group guidance sessions to meet specific needs of students to ensure academic and social-emotional growth. Teams of teachers are working together and making instructional changes for these students. As a result, targeted students benefit from strategies and programs specific to their learning needs and are awarded Rising Stars certificates at monthly Parent Teacher Association meetings. Grade curriculum meetings are held in the morning and evening where school goals are distributed to parents.
- All staff members participate in collaborative teacher teams that foster researching and sharing effective instructional strategies to improve student learning outcomes.
 - Teacher teams meet weekly to discuss targeted groups of students, selected based on assessment results, being tracked and their progress towards meeting short-term goals. When looking at student work regarding an implemented strategy, a tuning protocol is followed. A grade 8 team discussed a packet of student work for an implemented mathematics strategy. Ultimately, the instructional strategy, adding a picture of a balance scale and the incorporation of subtraction problems, was adjusted when the target students struggle to achieve mastery. Team members state they have in autonomy in decision making affecting instruction and curriculum.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend communication and collaboration with parents to increase their capacity to understand and assist in their child's learning and track progress towards attaining goals.
 - Students are engaged in peer and self reflection, and engage in individual conferences with teachers to understand their learning goals and next steps. However, families are not engaged in reciprocal and ongoing discussions for student progress concerning strengths, weaknesses and next learning steps, even though the school provides parents with multiple opportunities for ARIS training and workshops, and sends home needs improvement letters. Parents interviewed did not know their child's specific and immediate goals and consequently felt they were unable to effectively support their child's learning at home. In addition, the practice of providing feedback to students and families on student progress and opportunities for support and enrichment is inconsistent across teachers.

- Continue to track progress of learning goals in all subject areas across grades to make adjustments to school-wide, teacher team and classroom plans and goals.
 - Currently teacher teams are collaboratively engaged in developing common assessments in all content areas and across grades to track student progress and adjust instructional goals and plans based on outcomes. However, this practice is not sufficiently set up to meet the goals of all targeted students, hindering adjustments to school-wide plans for the future.

- Establish a transparent collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim goals in order to make improvements to plans and strategies over time as needed.
 - Each teacher team follows a prescribed format for setting goals, developing an action plan, and creating an assessment to measure targeted student outcomes for each unit of study. Although the core team members share successful strategies from the various teacher teams and then bring them back to their own teacher teams, there is no schoolwide transparent system in place to communicate all of the results from all teams to the entire staff on a continuous basis.

- Develop a system to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams and teacher leadership development so that adaptations can be made to practices which accelerate overall student learning.
 - School leaders are developing systems to regularly use data to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams in structured collaborations and to cultivate leadership development. Core team facilitators meet weekly with the administration to share and discuss the work of their teams. A system is developing, however, to evaluate the leadership ability and success of the yearlong facilitation of each teacher team and to regularly evaluate leadership development opportunities.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Irwin Altman Middle School	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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	
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, 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		

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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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				
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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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			
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>	UD	D	P	WD			
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					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed