

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle School M825**

**260 PLEASANT AVENUE
MANHATTAN
NY 10029**

Principal: LISA NELSON

**Dates of review: May 2- 3, 2012
Lead Reviewer: Luz T. Cortazzo**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science is a Junior High-Intermediate-Middle school with 366 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 22% Black, 73% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 17% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school maintains a safe environment and sets very high expectations for attendance, resulting in a student body that appreciates the support they receive for their personal and academic development and is engaged in learning. (1.4)
 - o Parents and students freely admit that the school is a safe place where students' social emotional and academic needs are readily addressed. The frequent review and effective use of information relative to the school's referral behavioral led to the implementation of a safety committee, which has resulted in diminished disciplinary and behavior issues. Additionally, the school's affiliation with Attendance Court and the Truancy Prevention Program has resulted in improved conduct, attendance and academic performance for selected students. Additionally, students stated that the school strongly supports their social emotional learning and through their student government, and their voice influences school-wide decisions such as the implementation of an anti-bullying program. All of these programs together result in increased engagement in all aspects of the school as well as personal growth and academic improvements.
- The school's internal capacity and partnerships with outside organizations support students in learning and in promotion academic and personal growth. (4.4)
 - o The school's guidance counselor shares strategies and provide workshops that support students and families on their path to post secondary readiness. Through an affiliation with College for Every Student, Advisory Program, Say Yes to Education, Career Day and the celebration of College Day, students are encouraged to accelerate their academic and personal growth, as evidenced by the increasing proficiency levels for targeted students in English language arts and math as noted in the latest assessments results.
 - o An array of additional internal and external partnerships provide students and their families with extensive social services as well as recreational and educational experiences. Real world learning opportunities during the day and after school are provided for 6th graders by Citizen Schools. This partnership provides apprenticeship opportunities ranging from video game design to cookbook publishing with guidance from Citizen teachers on site at Google. These experiences help students enhance their literacy skills and help them accomplish goals needed on a path to success for high school, college and career. Additionally, Mount Sinai Adolescent Mental Clinic, Union Settlement House and Urban Advantage provide support services for students based on data gathered from one-on one conference and interim assessment results. The impact of these programs results in students' social-emotional development and participation in enrichment and motivational activities that make college seem attainable.
- The school has strategically crafted integrated curricula that align key State standards with modifications and extensions to meet the diverse learning needs of students. (1.1)

- The school's instructional leadership team studied the citywide expectations for introducing the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and subsequently infused rigorous practices such as looking at student work, analyzing text complexity and adding more complex and varied texts into the curriculum. This strategic planning is especially evident in curriculum maps for grades 6 through 8. As a result, teachers are positioned to expose all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, to a rich humanities curriculum that teaches critical thinking skills, conceptualization, understanding and analysis of historical events through robust, meaningful units of study, such as the 8th grade unit on "World War II and the Holocaust" that requires students to use a wide variety of high-level thinking.
- Most classroom lessons include activities that allow for increased listening and thinking by students, resulting in their deeper understanding of complex ideas. (1.2)
 - Staff across the school agree that students learn best when they are engaged, challenged and provided with ample time to process new information with their peers in order to clarify their thinking as they assume a stance in their learning. Therefore, teachers often encourage students to think-pair-share as a strategy to either agree or question each other's thinking. As a result, most students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, are able to articulate and defend their answers to questions, either using differentiated texts or during self-selected humanities projects. Consequently, all students benefit from the combined differentiated instructional support of their classmates and teachers, which supports their understanding of content.
- The principal makes informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school so that students' areas of growth are addressed efficiently and consistently. (1.3)
 - In alignment with the school's instructional goals, the principal has carefully matched internal coaches, critical friends and instructional network personnel with classrooms to provide a balance of demonstration lessons and weekly collaborative planning sessions with individual teachers and teams. A significant investment has been made to have all 6th grade students attend a mandatory Citizen Schools extended day program that provides the middle school students with hands-on learning opportunities beyond the traditional learning day. As a result, students' writing skills are improving as evidenced by the students' writing pieces observed during the Academic League portion of extended time.
- Teachers use a consistent set of interim assessments to effectively measure student mastery of content and skills so that strengths and needs of students are identified and addressed accordingly. (2.2)
 - This year, the school is focused on looking at an array of student data to identify which skills the students have mastered and which they need to teach or reteach. Teachers create assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's key standards and curricula, providing feedback on instructional decisions. As a result, teachers are demonstrating a marked improvement in the way they use data to identify skills that must be addressed during subsequent mini-lessons in class and during academic intervention. Additionally, during the 6th grade math inquiry team meeting the teacher team are equipped to tangibly discuss the ongoing needs of particular students on the grade and identify strategies to support said students with supplemental learning opportunities, such as academic intervention during and after the school day.

- o All teachers consistently demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of each student's changing needs, as demonstrated by their ongoing analysis of a wide range of data, including exit slips in math, unit tests, conference notes, student writing, math samples and Acuity. As a result of supplementing summative data with these pieces, teachers are prepared to adjust their teaching resources and strategies to challenge students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, as evidenced in a sixth grade humanities class.

What the school needs to improve

- Formalize lesson observation procedures that reflect and support attainment of individual goals to support professional growth and achievement of students. (4.1)
 - o School leaders and staff have agreed upon a common framework for teacher observation and teachers have set their own goals for professional growth. However, the principal has not set a consistent system for all administrators to conduct frequent cycles of observations and provide frequent feedback about teachers' strengths and areas for improvement aligned with their individual professional needs based on observations. The school provides opportunities for professional learning aligned to school-wide initiatives rather than with teachers' individualized professional needs. Consequently, this hinders the school's ability to identify specific, targeted next steps to improve teacher practice.
- Increase parent voice in school-wide decision making and planning so that the school develops an additional voice that enlists the broader local community in supporting college and career readiness. (3.1)
 - o School leadership and faculty engage in discussions and action planning at the school level apparent in the Comprehensive Education Plan, but it is not thoughtfully designed to leverage changes that explicitly link to accelerated student learning based on data. However, at this time, parents express their participation in important school activities, and some are members of the School's Leadership Team, but most are just beginning to join the school decision-making conversation during monthly meetings. As such, the extended school community is not fully informed of this year's action plan for continued school improvement and, consequently, cannot yet support the school in its efforts.
- Refine action planning to support interim goals and benchmarks for all plans so that progress can be measured, readjustments made and celebrate success along the way to support improvements. (5.3)
 - o The principal, teacher teams and individual teachers all analyze quantifiable interim data from Acuity, unit tests, conference notes and exit slips in order to address the changing academic needs of individual students across the school. Similarly, 6th graders are placed in suitable groups of 10 students during extended day with Citizen Schools. However, at this time, the school does not yet have a transparent system for all members of the school community to measure and evaluate progress toward interim and long-term goals, or to identify areas where improvements in plans are needed. This hinders the school's ability to identify specific areas where adjustments in plans and instructional strategies are needed at targeted intervals in order to increase student achievement.

- Sharpen the school's use of data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaborations. (5.4)
 - Teacher teams convene weekly to engage in reflective crosstalk about the trends identified in student work, Common Core Learning Standards and performance tasks. In addition, they regularly discuss students' conceptual understanding in math, student writing and make curricular adjustments so that there is increased alignment between the taught curriculum and performance tasks. However, the effectiveness of these discussions is not being measured. At this time, the school has not yet developed a system to use data regularly to assess the effectiveness of evaluation, capacity building and mentoring supports for new and seasoned staff. Consequently, this limits the school's ability to support distributed leadership.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science	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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			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, guidance/advisement 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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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
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