

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**The School for Inquisitive Minds**

**Elementary-Middle School 270**

**233-15 Merrick Boulevard  
Queens  
NY 11422**

**Principal: Eleanor S. Andrew**

**Dates of review: December 5 – 6, 2011**

**Lead Reviewer: Lenon Murray**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The School for Inquisitive Minds is an elementary-middle school with 660 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 94% Black, 2% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 96.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty deliver an engaging standards-based curriculum including the Arts that addresses the needs of a diverse group of learners in order to promote postsecondary readiness in all grades.(1.1)
  - The school leaders and faculty design and utilize curriculum maps that are translated into units of study by teacher teams. These maps are based on the State standards in the core subject areas. A strong emphasis is placed on the visual and performing Arts in order to provide students with a balanced educational experience. The school has begun to actively integrate the CCLS tasks in English language arts (ELA) and math. In ELA students had to read text deeply to answer questions on forensic anthropology and in math students were required to justify their problem-solving in writing. This has led to a noticeable improvement in student writing on all grade levels as evidenced by student work in folders and on bulletin boards in the classrooms.
  - Teachers collaborate to create challenging curricula tasks in all major subject areas including the Arts. In an eighth grade class students were required to study the history of mandalas, create their own mandala and write a four page essay explaining their creative process. In grades kindergarten through 5, teachers develop tasks by grade during their lesson planning. On grades 6 to 8, teachers meet by subject area in mathematics, English language arts, social studies and science to provide progressive developmental lesson planning. The school has refined the curriculum for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs) and advanced students who are capable of taking Regents exams in math and science. For example, accelerated students learn advanced algebra to solve equations with independent variables. As a result, almost 40% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders earn high school credits.
- Teaching strategies reflect a commitment to a differentiated model with multiple entry points, enabling students to accelerate their learning. (1.2)
  - Teachers throughout the school make diligent efforts to deliver their lessons using flexible grouping and they emphasize student participation in accountable talk activities and classroom discussion. Teachers utilize mini-lessons for teaching new content and actively demonstrate the skills that need to be learned. Teachers tend to circulate throughout the room during guided practice providing individual intervention as needed while checking for understanding. This approach has led to high levels of student participation and engagement.
  - The faculty infuses varying levels of differentiation into their lessons. In a second grade self-contained class, the teacher and paraprofessional taught a theatrical play to the students with each student playing a unique character role. They coach the students using voice tone, visual prompts, auditory cues and movement. In a sixth grade math class, the teacher brings struggling students to the chalkboard to work through the problem-solving procedure with direct coaching. Across classrooms students are

grouped according to their assessment data so their needs can be more adequately met in small, flexible groups. As a result of consistent differentiation of tasks students' state that they feel more challenged and motivated in their class work.

- The school leadership makes thoughtful organizational decisions that support the school's instructional goals and raise student achievement. (1.3)
  - The school leadership has been systematic in utilizing resources to promulgate its goals. The school has maintained a full time arts teacher for the middle grades. They have photo-journalism, ballroom dancing and a new Odyssey Program for high achievers in the upper elementary grades. They have dedicated resources to interactive whiteboards, computers, and accelerated learning opportunities for students in Regents coursework in algebra and earth science. Projects are required for promotion and graduation and the level of projects has increased as measured by grade-level rubrics. As a result, students report that these opportunities greatly enrich their school experience and demonstrate high standards in their project-based learning.
  - Student and teacher time is tightly structured for maximum impact. While teacher time is built into the schedule, the principal evaluates the schedule on a weekly basis and often times makes quick changes to provide regular meeting time for teacher teams including inter-disciplinary meetings on the upper grades. Teacher teams spend significant time on analyzing student work and devising challenging academic tasks for all students, for example projects are required that include research, writing and presentation. Coaches work with small cohorts of teachers and teach some classes. As a result, parents and teachers are confident about the level of challenge in the curriculum which results in projects that are displayed in classrooms and contributes to students improving grades.
- Teams of teachers and individual teachers use a variety of assessment tools to provide a complete picture of progress for all students across all areas of curriculum and to inform classroom level decisions to increase growth. (2.2)
  - Teams of teachers have created and selected rubrics for all aspects of student work including writing and projects across the curriculum. Teachers also develop unit assessments that are shared across grades and among grades to improve alignment to key standards across the school in order to more effectively evaluate instructional strategies. Teachers explain standards to students and use the assessments to provide feedback on their teaching. This has led to an increased emphasis on instructional strategies to improve comprehension and academic vocabulary to increase student growth in these areas.
  - The school faculty uses a range of student performance data that includes Periodic Assessments and classroom level benchmarks administered every few eight weeks to inform their lesson planning. Individual teachers use a variety of assessments to monitor their own teaching including homework assignments, projects, quizzes and writing on demand. For students with disabilities, evidence indicated that they experienced difficulty expressing details in their writing. Consequently, these students were provided with additional strategies and practice in

identifying and writing details. This practice has led to improved work products as measured by writing rubrics.

- Professional development opportunities including frequent cycles of observation support the school's instructional priorities and enable teachers to collaborate to improve their practice. (4.1)
  - The school leaders use formal and informal classroom observations in the form of short, frequent cycles to improve teacher instructional practice. These observations are based upon a research-based rubric which is thoroughly familiar to the teachers based upon professional development and coaching at the school and network level. This agreed-upon rubric provides specific feedback to teachers on strategies for classroom management, higher-level questioning, and facilitating high levels of student engagement. School leaders work in tandem with coaches and encourage teachers to articulate their own goals. Newer teachers are provided with mentors and paired up with buddy teachers who can support them informally. Student work is a crucial part of this conversation on teacher practice. As a consequence, the school provides targeted professional development that impacts student outcomes positively and provides evidence for tenure and retention decisions.
- The school's highly refined communication systems keep staff, and families informed of students' academic and social progress which results in steady progress. (3.4)
  - Parents value the high expectations that are consistently communicated to them and have earned the school a sound reputation throughout the community. Families appreciate the newsletters that are sent home, the progress reports on-line and in print, the frequent assemblies and concerts at which the students perform and the communication from teachers as soon as a potential problem is identified. They are positive about the accessibility of teachers to engage in conversations regarding student strengths and needs. Parents state unequivocally that they feel supported by their children's teachers.
  - School leaders have communicated the highest of expectations to the entire staff around professionalism and quality of instruction. The school faculty expressed dissatisfaction with student achievement this past year. Network subject area specialists have provided job-embedded coaching on the implementation of the CCLS tasks which has increased the rigor in the whole curriculum. This has led to individual staff members tutoring students on their lunch and preparation periods and spontaneously supporting each other in their classrooms.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Streamline the use of grading policies and tools including rubrics to organize and analyze student performance trends to inform and improve instruction. (2.3)
  - Teachers analyze and use data from summative and interim assessments to make classroom level decisions. They organize their data in personal

binders or electronic devices and computers including Excel spreadsheets. Teachers have access to identified trends and patterns particularly among student subgroups. Grading policies are generally similar across grades. However, some teachers devise distinctions among performance levels and percentages which are not built into the rubric. A fourth grade class added pluses and minuses to performance levels one through four. An eighth grade class preferred letter grades “A” through “F” even though the performance level equivalent is displayed. This opens the analysis of performance results to subjective interpretations which limits the school’s ability to establish consistency in data evaluation and decision making, in order to target areas of growth and needs for student progress.

- Refine the protocols to track learning goals for all students in order to identify strategies that accelerate student improvement. (3.2)
  - Teachers meet in teams to systematically use student performance data to set goals for their classes and subgroups. A fifth grade teacher monitors the students’ status during individual conferring sessions while their peers are working independently or in groups. These teacher-student conferences are the forum in which goals are examined and upgraded. Teachers upgrade goals at their discretion based on the data. However, there is no school-wide protocol that reinforces the urgency of accelerated learning. As a result, some subgroups such as students with disabilities linger on their goals for long periods of time and changes in classroom practice are not sufficiently evident. The lack of a school wide protocol aligned to student learning expectations increases the challenge for all students in moving efficiently to their next steps.
- Increase the availability of quality, differentiated professional development to promote deeper reflection, self-evaluation and sustained improvement in classroom practice to improve student growth. (4.3)
  - Specialists from the school’s network provide training in teaching content and instructional strategies. The training is differentiated to meet teacher needs. The work of involving students in the CCLS tasks has been an area of emphasis. While teachers express gratitude and appreciation for the training opportunities, they have difficulty explaining specific practices they have developed as a result of the trainings. Thus, the lack of teachers’ ability to articulate specific instructional practices lessens effective implementation of strategies to increase student outcomes.
- Strengthen the use of data analysis to regularly evaluate school systems and programs to promote more effective professional collaborations. (5.4)
  - School leaders and faculty review teacher teams engaged in active collaboration. The team agendas and minutes are regularly turned in to school leadership. There are ongoing conversations between faculty and school leadership about student assessment data and how capacity can be strengthened among teachers. However, minimal evidence exists of specific improvements that have been made among teacher teams as a direct result of the evaluation process. The absence of evidence of specific improvements hinders opportunities for the school leadership to inform the effectiveness of team work to improve student outcomes.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The School for Inquisitive Minds	UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		<b>X</b>					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>