

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The Isaac Varian School

Elementary School X008

**3010 Briggs Avenue
Bronx
NY 10458**

Principal: Rosa Peralta

Dates of review: January 30 – 31, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Sonia Menendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 8 is an elementary school with 1213 students from Kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 10% Black, 71% Hispanic, 9% White, 6% Asian and 3% other students. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a highly effective manager whose use of resources and strategic organizational decisions lead to successful practices that result in improved student outcomes. (1.3)
 - The budget is expertly developed to provide for before and after school programs as well as Saturday classes in order to carefully match students with needed interventions. Staffing and scheduling decisions are made to support the collaborative work so that teachers have multiple opportunities to meet together. Assistant principals, two literacy coaches and a lead teacher on each grade facilitate weekly common planning meetings to support teachers in developing rigorous lessons aligned to the curriculum. As a result of the careful scheduling and best use of teacher and student time, individual student needs are met and supported leading to increased progress on formative assessment data as evidenced by more than 50% of the students performing in Tiers 3 and 4.
 - Since the school is extremely overcrowded with capping in several grades and a utilization rate of over 120%, the principal faces many organizational challenges. In previous years, the school had a large pull-out and push-in Early Grade Reduction and English as a second language program which caused many interruptions. This year, in an effort to eliminate interruption to instructional time and reduce class size, the principal formed team teaching classes on each grade so that teachers share responsibility for a group of students. In addition, students eligible for English as a second language (ESL) services are clustered in classes allowing ESL teachers to push in during the literacy block to provide small group instruction. As a result, students benefit from lower student/teacher ratio and better alignment of instruction among classroom teachers and support staff. Consequently, only 6% of the students in third grade scored in Tier 1 on the most recent predictive assessment.
- The school's curriculum has been successfully developed and aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) so that students have opportunities to engage in rigorous tasks. (1.1)
 - During the summer, teacher teams and administrators planned and modified the curriculum with unit plans and pacing guides for all content areas in relation to the CCLS so that teachers know what key standards students need to learn. Curriculum maps define sequences of learning across grades with performance tasks embedded in each unit in an effort to close the achievement gap. As a result of this work, teachers use common language to discuss the key standards chosen by the school and a consistency of content is evident in classrooms leading to students making gains on the state science assessment.
 - The school's vertical planning team, which includes a teacher from each grade, coaches and administrators, works collaboratively to inform the sequence of learning across grades so that the curriculum builds on what is taught in the previous grade and emphasizes higher order thinking

skills and rigorous habits. This provides teachers with strategies on how to modify and scaffold in order to support the learning needs of English language learners and student with special needs. As a result, teachers provide instruction that is engaging and motivating to meet the needs of all students as seen in a science class, where students of varying language proficiencies worked in pairs on a hands-on sensory task.

- Teachers benefit from frequent cycles of observations with specific feedback on pedagogy and next learning steps so that teachers know their areas of strength and those needing further development. (4.1)
 - Professional development is clearly a focus at the school so that teachers may best support increased outcomes for students. An observation schedule demonstrates frequent cycles of observations. Supervisors effectively gather information on teacher practice through formal and informal observations and conversations, learning walks and one-on-one goal setting meetings. As a result, teachers state that they feel well supported and further develop their skills to improve their practice.
 - School administrators and coaches make extensive use of data to identify areas where students need additional support and use the information to plan professional development. A review of the state assessment data demonstrated that the school declined slightly in English language arts and mathematics, therefore the principal made different assignments, particularly to the fourth grade team, which had the lowest percent of students in levels 3 and 4. Several teachers looped with their classes and an additional literacy coach was hired so that teachers can receive more professional development support. As a result, the principal states “there has been a shift in the school towards more professionalism and focus on improving instruction,” as evidenced by a decrease of students in Tier 1 on the most recent math predictive.
- Collaborative planning is highly effective, focused on careful data review, looking closely at student work and improving teacher practice in order to increase student outcomes. (4.2)
 - Teachers welcome the opportunity to meet together and state the support they receive from the coaches and colleagues serves as an effective way to sharpen their teaching skills. The work of teacher teams is complemented by grade level lead teachers who take on significant leadership roles and work as facilitators at weekly teacher meetings. Lead teachers meet regularly with coaches and the assistant principal and cascade the information to their colleagues, thus supporting a collaborative culture. The growing confidence and professional manner of teachers have helped to establish a clear professional development plan in which teachers are fully involved in its implementation. As a result teachers state that this sharing of ideas is helping their students do better since 85% of the students met the goals identified for the unit.
 - All teachers meet in weekly formal meetings to discuss data and its implications. The literacy coach supports teachers with a detailed analysis of the demands of state assessments and identified the gaps of how their students performed. Teachers use this information to modify

their units of study and inform their instruction. As a result, student writing samples demonstrate progress from their September baseline.

- The school has clearly defined systems to monitor and make revisions to the curriculum and professional development in response to student learning needs, paying close attention to the CCLS. (5.1)
 - The principal fosters a reflective and evaluative culture where teachers review the curriculum and their teaching with a clear focus on how students are learning. At the end of each unit, in their common planning meetings, teachers identify the strengths of the unit and areas that need further refinement based on a review of student work and the expectations of the CCLS. As a result, suitable changes are made to maximize student learning as evidenced in end of unit assessments. Consequently, students have made progress since September, moving from 30% then to 85% of the students currently met end of unit goals.
 - Teachers engage in effective review of student work during common planning meetings to ensure individual students and classes are progressing. This leads to a high level of conversation amongst teachers in reference to the instructional strategies that teachers use to improve learning outcomes. As a result of this dialogue, effective pedagogy is shared, leading to congruence of instruction that supports students' mastery of CCLS as evidenced by students' writing samples demonstrating progress from the September baseline.
- Teachers collaborate to create common grade-wide assessments in order to evaluate effectiveness of instructional decisions and interventions. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams develop diagnostic assessments to capture how well students are mastering what is taught. This data is used to target support and provide intervention for individual students, as well as to address weaknesses across classes and grades. Rubrics have been developed and are used consistently by all teachers to assess students' writing skills. Consequently, the school ensures a more reliable and consistent evaluation of student achievement including targeted subgroups.
 - Teachers work collaboratively and effectively to develop common assessments that include supports for English language learners and students with special needs. In addition to summative data, teachers review a wide range of data sources to monitor student performance and progress. A writing rubric was developed by teachers and is used across grades to provide clear expectations and consistency in reviewing student work. Every student has a portfolio for literacy and math with several published pieces which teachers review to monitor progress. As a result of this work, teachers are effectively identifying and monitoring students' strengths and weaknesses and then use this data to inform instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand teacher pedagogy in order to deepen differentiation of instruction so that across classroom lessons offer suitable challenge for all students. (1.2)

- A key focus for the school is to support teachers in using data to plan and provide differentiated instruction. Although students work in collaborative groups on similar tasks, they sometimes lack the appropriate supports and extensions to meet the diverse needs of English language learners, students with special needs and high achieving students. As a result, the effectiveness of instruction for these subgroups is limited.
- Teachers deliver lessons that are engaging, focused and inclusive via a workshop model. However, not all lessons lead to high levels of student thinking, as evidenced by tasks where students are not consistently asked to evaluate or analyze using critical thinking processes. As a result, not all students are sufficiently challenged.
- Enhance the goal setting process to include differentiated short and long term learning goals in order to accelerate student progress. (3.2)
 - School leaders and faculty work collaboratively to plan and set goals for student achievement. Teachers meet with the administration to discuss their annual goals for students. However, goals lack interim benchmarks by which to assess progress towards meeting these goals. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to make targeted and timely adjustments to instruction and curricula.
- Expand the collection, monitoring and analysis of data sources in order to evaluate the progress towards meeting long term goals. (5.3)
 - Although the school has good systems in collating information about student learning to garner a general overview of how the school is doing, there remain weaknesses in the way in which the analysis is used to garner genuine ownership of the goals. As a result, the interim assessment demonstrates that many students are still below the benchmark level for their grade.
 - Teacher teams engage in an analysis of data to monitor progress and make modifications in order to ensure student achievement. However, the school is working on making this process part of a strong collaborative culture since it was weak in the past as evidenced in the School Survey. As a result, the school is not strongly evaluative in its review of short term goals in order to maximize improvement.
- Strengthen the communication with parents to consistently convey information on the progress of their children and how to support them at home so that parents know the next learning steps for their children. (2.4)
 - The school works hard to increase the parental involvement in the school through a range of workshops including an extremely popular Family Night. Although there are multiple opportunities for parents to engage in school activities and receive feedback on student progress not all parents are clear about what are the next learning steps for their children resulting in missed opportunities to support student outcomes at home.
 - Parents report valuing the support that they receive from the school especially the technology classes that help parents become more adept at using the computer and navigating web sites to help their children at

home. Parents were less satisfied with the feedback they receive about how their children are doing and are not fully adept at using educational tools to understand their children's performance. As a result, not all parents have a deep understanding of their children's progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The Isaac Varian 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 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