Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Urban Institute of Mathematics

Middle School 371

650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465

Principal: Jennifer Joynt

Dates of review: May 6 - 7, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Alycia C. Rhinehart

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Institute of Mathematics is a middle school with 285 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 12% Black, 59% Hispanic, 24% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students engage in inquiry, discussion, research, and debate as inroads for accessing curricular content throughout grade levels and content areas leading to meaningful student engagement and work products. (1.2)

  - Faculty employs the use of visual tools such as SMARTBoard, Powerpoint, and ELMO to ensure that teaching practice is multimodal. In addition, levels 3 and 4 questions of Webb's Depth of Knowledge can be heard throughout classrooms, as one of the ways to engage students in responding to and participating in higher order questions. In the grade 6 science classroom, students were asked, "Do you think there will be future problems? How does your evidence prove your claim?" "Describe what happened to the initial populations of each colored walking stick for each generation. Hypothesize why this might be." In the grade 6 social studies classroom, students were asked, "Could there have been a better solution to resolve the issue of slavery in the new territories? If so, what were the problems with the Missouri Compromise? Explain." The principal cited questioning, designing coherent instruction, and assessment as the pedagogical focal points for this academic year. Consequently, teachers are discussing ways to craft, refine, and tailor questions aligned with Webb's Depth of Knowledge levels 3 and 4. During inquiry team meetings, faculty considers the effectiveness of their questions using student work products generated within the context of their instructional delivery and planning. The work to clarify and strengthen the link between instructional delivery, student learning, and reflective practice, has resulted in robust instruction designed to meet the needs of all students.

  - During a grade 6 Socratic Seminar, students were engaged in discussions around the Emmitt Till murder and Of Mice and Men as a platform for critical lens writing and elucidation of the nation's historical climate during the Civil Rights Movement. Students used the critical lens writing rubric and a writing task sheet to ensure that their writing included the elements needed to develop a substantive essay synchronizing their points of view and understandings of the historical events and literary-depicted accounts during a specific point in American history. In grade 7, students' wrote an essay in response to the question, "What is the role of the people in a democracy and how did the Constitution affect the political, economic, and social issues in the new nation?" Students discussed their points of view and completed a peer review checklist to provide peer-level feedback on the content and mechanics of each other's written work. Additionally, students used the Constitution Essay rubric to check their own writing's alignment with Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) expectations. Students engaged in multiple peer-reviewed, teacher-reviewed, and self-monitoring writing opportunities directly linked to curricular content which enhanced the outcome of their writing leading to high levels of student participation in their own learning process.

- The school's leadership strategically aligns and links organizational decisions with this year's instructional goals and long-range planning to promote student mastery. (1.3)

  - The principal appointed content area instructional leads so that vertical Common Core alignment of curricular content is examined and advanced. The Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) goal 2 states, "Students will demonstrate the ability to use clear and relevant evidence to support their assertions in essays aligned to the expectations of the CCLS." Aligned with the accompanying action plan, the grade 7 Relationships Unit outline identifies a CCLS writing and language standards as points of student learning and assessment within the unit of study. The Origins of Bullying and Gang Leader for a Day are used as supporting texts for generating student writing. Furthermore, in partnership with the City University of New York, a specialized high school preparation class occurs after school and is led by Urban Institute of Mathematics faculty (one mathematics and one English teacher) targeting grade 7 students in the spring and grade 8 in the fall (same cohort of students). Curricular content organization and delivery in concert with partnerships as routes for students' college and career readiness has generated high levels of student writing and projects that satisfy the school's instructional goals.

  - Instructional leads meet with grade level faculty (English, science, and social studies) at least twice per week in professional learning communities to analyze students' work products. Team meetings function as a point for improving instructional practice via student work analysis. Meetings are structured as a 55-minute consultancy eliciting facts, gaps, processes, further

considerations, and next steps. The grade 7 inquiry team focused their meeting on the following question, “Did our students make progress from one task to another? If so, what strategies helped achieve progress?” Teachers noticed that one of the lower performing students was able to develop the topic using three relevant sources of evidence and was able to provide concrete details in some paragraphs to support the topic while incorporating vocabulary and logical reasoning to connect evidence with his claim. Albeit, the student needed more support in refuting counterclaims. In response, the teachers have identified at least two next steps for improving their instruction to prepare this student for 8th grade. They will develop a graphic organizer for refuting counterclaims and continue to provide opportunities for students to practice making claims and counterclaims using textual evidence. As a result, the team’s intentional adjustments to instruction are designed to ensure that all students are on course toward meeting the school’s instructional goals and engaged in rigorous academic tasks.

- Common assessments and student work products are analyzed using Common Core-aligned rubrics so that faculty, administration, and students are aware of student progress and next steps in their learning. (2.2)
    - Faculty use Common Core-aligned rubrics available from the Common Core Library. Student work is accompanied by rubrics which define and detail the features of generative work products along the Emerging, Developing, Proficient, and Exemplary aptitude levels, thus, students’ grades are dependent upon those four proficiency levels. The principal and faculty focus on the citywide instructional expectations identifying five standards in literacy for student mastery across grades. Consequently, students are knowledgeable participants in their own progress toward mastery and the focus standards are embedded in their literacy, social studies, mathematics, science writing experiences. For example, grade 7 students wrote an essay entitled, Causes of the Revolution. Throughout the writing of the essay, students referred to the rubric which defines levels toward mastery. Students’ grades are dependent upon meeting the expectations outlined in rubrics developed for each curricular content assignment. Teachers and students draw upon the language of the rubrics to grade student work products and gauge student progress toward mastery in the school’s selected/focus standards grounding themselves in a common and clear definition and language of success.
    - The exchange of questions, clarifications, and feedback in the context of the workshop model affords students various opportunities to construct understanding of curricular content. Additionally, teachers purposefully craft questions which serve as the underpinning for surfacing students’ understandings and uncover possible misconceptions. For example, in a grade 6 science classroom, the teacher asked, “What was the most striking thing you found when you looked at your data?” As students explained their rationale, the teacher was able to uncover students’ misunderstandings and ask probing questions to provide clarification from him as well as students’ peers. Students also refer to the rubric linked to the content as a self-reflective point for progress and next steps for learning. For example, one student met her Degrees of Reading Progress learning goal and, in conference with her teacher, planned next steps for reaching higher levels of Degrees of Reading Progress. Student ownership of their own learning progress resulted in active student engagement in reaching self-identified goals and progress toward their own learning.
- Student learning outcomes and classroom observation data are used by administrators to provide effective feedback that promotes professional growth and reflection. (4.1)
    - The approach to teacher practice development is identified by administration and is tailored to students’ learning needs identified. Faculty and administration collaborate to provide feedback to each other throughout the academic year using the Danielson framework, specifically around designing coherent instruction, questioning techniques, and assessment of student learning. Intervisitations and intravisitations are coordinated within the school as well as within the network and an action plan for teachers is collaboratively developed. Following a classroom visit, administrators meet with teachers to provide immediate feedback and follow-up written feedback. For example, the principal advised a new teacher to consult with the English department faculty to develop a discussion rubric for his students so that he would pay particular attention to and assess the learning behaviors associated with discussion. The principal stated, “We try not to blanket everything… I may not provide teachers the same amount of formal observation, but I have offered written feedback at least 10-15 times to each teacher so far this year.” In this way, “We link teacher practice with student work data. When we are in the classrooms, in order to move practice, the feedback on teacher observation reports speaks explicitly to the impact of teacher practice upon student progress.” As such, the principal’s feedback for the aforementioned teacher includes the

following next steps, “Push for more differentiation. Remember, you can differentiate by content, product, and/or process. … Push for scientific method to become an embedded practice in your classroom. This is critical particularly from a vertical curriculum standpoint, as scholars progress through middle school and culminate with the Living Environment Regents.” The principal reviews student data and communicates with faculty around improving teacher practice yielding precision in instruction necessary for student progress.

  - The CEP annual goal three is “Deepen the school community’s understanding of what high quality teaching looks like through professional development on three school-selected competencies from Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for teaching that supports implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards.” Using guided and reciprocal reading as text-based questioning, teachers are learning to support small groups of student during close reading of domain-specific complex texts. Teachers are also working on providing students with frequent and actionable feedback on their progress. An example of written feedback provided to faculty in order to nurture teachers’ practice to demonstrate these competencies reads as follows, “During today’s lesson you were able to conference with individual scholars. I encourage you to strengthen your conferencing/small group work by focusing on the following: guided reading, higher frequency of conferences, and writing conference on specific writing samples such as the CCLS tasks. Scholars stated that you conferenced with them only once or twice this year. Increase your frequency so that you can meet with more scholars, more often.” Specific and detailed feedback to faculty aligned with professional goals reinforces the development of teaching practice needed to forward the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards so that student achievement is enhanced.

- Systems and structures are in place to evaluate and sustain the integrity of an inclusive culture that supports and optimizes student learning. (5.1)
  - Student learning needs are surfaced via the weekly teacher team meetings (two periods per week). Teacher teams examine student learning student work products and rubrics. Additionally, the administration examines instructional design (what is taught) and classroom teaching practice (how content is taught) to fortify student success in Common Core learning expectations. These purposeful efforts are coupled frequent classroom walkthroughs and formal observations, each of which generates written feedback to faculty. “What will scholars be able to learn/produce at the end of this lesson? Ensure that the CCLS are at the forefront of your planning and pedagogy. In other words, how did this lesson support the standards?” The principal created an Observation Tracker for determining the proficiency levels of teaching practice noted during each walkthrough and formal observation. The Observation Tracker serves to gauge the frequency with which teachers are provided feedback so that the link between curricular content delivery and student learning opportunities are maximized.
  - The Urban Institute of Mathematics evaluates school culture and develops shared expectations via several avenues within the constituents of the school’s community. Extracurricular activities, such as stage productions, field trips, service learning projects, and in-school special events are driven by the student government in order to strengthen school culture. Families and students also reach out to local legislators to request funding for improved/upgraded classroom materials/technology so that students can successfully learn within the framework of the Common Core Learning Standards. The Pupil Personnel Committee is led by the school’s guidance counselor and has a point person in each grade level that reviews and considers a variety data sets for surfacing students’ social-emotional and learning needs. The committee meets each week to identify students who need social emotional support as well as academic support. The committee develops and systematizes a plan of action for each student based on data reviewed in Engrade® and assessment data collected from faculty, ARIS, attendance, and families. The principal reviews the roster of students identified by the committee and, at her discretion the principal meets with families and/or follows up with the committee to discuss further actions and action plan progress. As an example, in January, 2013, the committee identified a grade 6 student who needed additional support in science, social studies, math, and English. The student was placed in the school’s Tier II intervention. As a result, the student is now showing incremental gains in math, science, social studies, and literacy. The principal and the faculty draw upon the Pupil Personnel Committee as the point for evaluating the quality of school culture and students’ academic needs resulting in the adjustments necessary to support students’ meeting CCLS expectations.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the alignment of curricula and academic tasks with CCLS so that all students and teachers co-construct students' understanding of content across subjects in all grades. (1.1)
    - Students are engaged in learning experiences driven by Common Core-aligned units of study. In one sixth grade class, students were asked to write arguments to support their claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. Some students were challenged in demonstrating their own thinking and were emulating the teacher's thinking. They used their textbooks, viewed video clips and trade books, and internet sources to construct their content knowledge. In a seventh grade class, students were asked to write arguments and counter-arguments using textual evidence. They were given model essays to annotate and discuss in advance of writing their own essays. In addition, seventh grade students were given access two primary sources and graphic organizers to demonstrate their understanding of content. In a self-contained, special education classroom, students were learning probability and were asked, "What happens to probability when the number of favorable outcomes or total outcomes changes?" "How is the probability of an event determined and described?" The teacher observed and recorded students' responses to these questions in order to provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of probability. Students who were having difficulty with the concept of probability were offered an interactive SMARTboard lesson explaining probability and provided opportunities to predict coin choice from a bag of predetermined coins. However, extending these opportunities for students to construct curricular knowledge and emphasize higher order thinking skills is not yet an embedded practice across all subjects thus impeding the accelerated progress of the lowest performing students.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Urban Institute of Mathematics	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score				X
Instructional Core				
To what extent does the school regularly…	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?				X
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?				X
School Culture				
To what extent does the school …	UD	D	P	WD
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?				X
Systems for Improvement				
To what extent does the school …	UD	D	P	WD
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				X
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X	
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?				X

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed