# Quality Review Report

# 2013-2014

**Isaac Bildersee**

**Middle School 068**

**956 East 82nd Street**
**Brooklyn**
**NY 11236**

**Principal: Merve Williams**

**Dates of review: January 15 – 16, 2014**
**Lead Reviewer: Beverly A. Wilkins**

# Part 1: The school context

## Information about the school

Isaac Bildersee is a middle school with 745 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 90% Black, 5% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.7%.

## Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

# Part 2: Overview

## What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty create coherent curricula that connect cognitive skills within and across grades, aligned to Common Core Standards (CCLS), to promote rigor and high order skills to engage all learners. (1.1)

    - Curriculum maps across all content areas, including the arts, reflect both Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and citywide instructional shifts as evidenced in clearly articulated learning objectives, essential questions, cross curriculum connections, complex academic vocabulary, thoughtful activities, and varied assessments. Based on identified gaps in previous curriculums maps between CCLS, student needs, and instructional shifts, school leaders and teachers plan together to design curriculum that includes content understandings and grade-level competencies. Therefore, literacy and math instruction complements Scholastic Code X and CMP3 math via the integration of the school's key instructional strands. This work is evident in maps that depict hierarchical skills in all content areas such as students citing specific textual evidence to support analysis of central ideas, justify a claim or make a counter claim, provide descriptions, explanations, or examples of new terms encountered, relate concepts to real world experiences, and organize learning to present the thinking process. Curricular decisions promote rigor, authentic learning experiences, and relevancy for all learners. As such, horizontal and vertical coherence in written curriculums support the development of college and career readiness skills.

    - Coherent and robust curricular stimulate productive progressions of learning that develop independence and responsibility among diverse groups of learners. As a result, intentional pre-planned scaffolds and appropriate strategies constructed to meet the needs of a 13% English language learner (ELL) population and a 20% population of students with disabilities (SWD) offer multiple pathways to learning, which enable opportunities for students to demonstrate their ability and work through challenges productively. Written provisions for purposeful entry points ensure access to cognitively challenging tasks because learning goals are supported by a variety of visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic materials, and resources coupled with rich performance tasks adopted from EngageNY. As a result, students are able to utilize instructional aids that allow them to cognitively engage with complex ideas and deepen their conceptual understanding as observed in a seventh grade math class in which students factored linear expressions using algebra tiles to find the greatest common factor. In an English language arts classroom, eighth grade students with disabilities provided relevant details of character attributes to discuss inferences after reading college admission narratives. Thus, planned academic tasks closely aligned with learning standards engage diverse groups of learners.

- The principal utilizes the budget wisely and makes informed organizational decisions to support student achievement. (1.3)

- The principal makes smart use of the school's budget to support instructional goals aimed at increased academic achievement. Therefore, organizational decisions anchored in forward thinking about how best to allocate funds to improve the delivery of instruction result in meaningful student work products. For instances, spending in the area of technology places Smart boards in the majority of classrooms, gives students access to three fully equipped computer labs and a library media center reinforcing 21st century skill sets as well as connecting them to the outside world of information. Sixth graders integrate visual information such as graphs, photographs, and other information in print and digital texts into a history unit on the eastern hemisphere; seventh graders produce research projects on social issues utilizing online primary and secondary sources; and eighth graders take online science courses. Consequently, the use of technology increases the number of students producing meaningful work products.

- Prudent use of budget also includes an awarded Teacher Incentive Fund grant earmarked to improve teacher effectiveness via ongoing professional development toward building individual and collective capacity. As such, a Peer Instructional Coach, two Demonstration Teachers, and Teacher Ambassadors, selected from among the faculty, work yearlong with a Teacher Effectiveness Coach to strengthen their pedagogical in order to turnkey best practices and provide collegial support during the upcoming school year. In-house literacy and math coaches who also support teacher development aligned with CCLS expectations maximize this investment. Hence, twice per week teachers meet in grade and department teams to participate in teacher-facilitated meetings for the purpose of planning curriculum and analyzing student work. These structured forums result in students receiving tailored instruction during morning advisory, afterschool programs, and in clubs. Organizational decisions have direct impact on instruction. As one student reported, "Teachers try their best to make sure we understand the work in the new system". As a result, students experience progress as measured by growth percentiles on the most recent Progress Report.

- The school has created a culture of community that knows its students well, thus promoting positive personal, social, emotional, and academic behaviors in a safe, respectful environment. (1.4)

  - School leaders make it a priority to maintain a positive environment supportive of students and adults. As expressed by a parent, "The staff as a whole is very respectful and helpful, which creates a welcoming and friendly atmosphere". Administrators, faculty, and staff maintain an active presence in the corridors and outside the school to ensure smooth transitions during the school day, arrival, and dismissal. The academy structure within the building establishes point persons such as deans, guidance counselors, assistant principals, teachers, a community associate, and safety agents for the three cohorts of students, sixth grade through eighth grade, across three floors. As such, students and adults know each other extremely well. Students were able to provide the reviewer with an extensive list of adults within the school that they believe care about them. Students also shared that adults show an interest in them and keep them safe explaining that teachers are able to detect when something is not right by just looking at them. According to students, teachers take time to work with them individually, prepare them

for college by giving them advanced course work, and “blow up” their home phone when they are absent from school. In turn, there is a 50% decrease in the number of Online Occurrences Report System (OORS) incidents during the 2012-2013 school year compared to the 2011-2012 school year. Similarly, the overall attendance rate has improved over the past three years as reported by the principal. The school also posts the tenets of the *Leader in Me*, a leadership model, on hallway bulletin boards and in classrooms, which encourage students to adopt effective personal behaviors geared toward healthy social-emotional development. In addition, one period per week is devoted to the *Overcoming Obstacles* curriculum, which is designed to teach conflict resolution strategies. As a result, students describe the school’s supportive climate as one in which they develop synergy by putting together two heads to make ideas go around as in group work and engage in goal setting, which they describe as a contract for being successful in school and in life.

- The school communicates high expectations to staff, students, and parents, to engender accountability for continuous student progress. (3.4)

    - The school's focus on raising levels of student outcomes through consistently communicating professional standards inspires collective accountability for teaching and learning. The principal and assistant principals utilize faculty conferences and grade and department team meetings to convey clear professional and behavioral expectations. Hence, qualities and characteristics of effective leadership via the school's commitment to Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People/ Leader in Me Model* leverages the ability of teachers to counter barriers to learning, thus holding themselves accountable for imparting high expectations for learning. The Network supports administrators and teachers by providing professional development in CCLS linked to the Danielson Framework for Teaching with a deep focus on Domain 3, namely Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques; Engaging Students in Learning, and Using Assessments in Instruction. Clear messages around expectations for adults as leaders of learning and high regard for professionalism lead to improved teacher attendance, established classroom routines, and data informed instruction.

    - Teachers diligently work to prepare all students for their next academic level. This is evident in advance placement courses for high performing students, a Title III Saturday Academy for ELLs taught by certified English as a Second Language teachers, and an Academic Intervention Support (AIS) afterschool program for students retained. Therefore, high expectations result in students achieving "Honor Roll" status and regular attendance in intervention programs leads to increases in student achievement. For example, the pass rate for students taking the Earth Science course is approximately 85% and 70% of students taking Integrated Algebra gain proficiency. Similarly, ELL students make notable progress in language acquisition skills with high numbers of students reaching proficiency within two years. Consequently, outreach from teachers and guidance counselors result in academic plans and ongoing parent communication that help students meet performance expectations for learning. As such, parents expressed appreciation for "checks and balances" in support of student progress.

## What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that the delivery of instruction employs the scaffolds and questioning techniques outlined in the curricular to provide entry points, participation, and discussions that are appropriately challenging for all learners. (1.2)

    - Instruction in most classrooms reflects general alignment to the curricular and teachers' delivery of instruction generally reflects the school's belief about how students learn best as evidenced in real world connections in all lessons observed and collaborative engagement in most classrooms. However, teaching strategies, routines, and questioning in many classrooms, do not consistently meet the varied needs of learners, as prescribed in curriculum maps, resulting in uneven levels of student thinking, participation, and work products across the school. An English language arts class for special needs students, studying relevant text details to support inferences included varied techniques for fostering discussion, explanations of academic vocabulary, tiered questions, opportunity for students to write, as well as appropriate use of time. Nevertheless, this was not the practice in other classrooms where rapid fire questions, minimal discussion, absence of challenging activities, and poor use of time thwarted high levels of thinking, participation, and cognitive engagement. Because of inconsistency in the delivery of instruction that closely aligns with written curricular there are missed opportunities for students to think critically, engage in challenging tasks, and experience differentiated applications for access to learning.

- Sharpen the use of formative checks for understanding and student self-assessment practices to enable timely adjustments to instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. (2.2)

    - Teachers create and adopt performance tasks, administer baseline, mid-line, and end-line assessments, and use rubrics to grade student work. Although teachers also create unit assessments and measure student progress towards learning goals across the school and subject areas, providing actionable feedback to students is not yet an embedded practice. This is evident in student work products in folders, on classroom bulletin boards or on displayed work in corridors. During the review, many student work products were devoid of teacher feedback, feedback was not task specific, or teachers provide generic comments such as checkmarks or "good work". Thus, loose and limited feedback to students about their work and learning targets limits their potential to achieve mastery. Additionally, five out of seven classroom visits revealed a lack of evidence of teacher use of ongoing formative assessments to gauge student-learning progressions during lessons. In an eighth grade math class, exit slips prompted a review lesson on the Laws of Exponents. In a seventh grade math class, students used a coded card to signal the teacher for assistance. However, in other classrooms, teachers circulate as students work, but this practice of roving check-ins does not yield adjustments to lessons, conferring, or mid-lesson interruption to share teacher observations that reinforce or redirect for keeping students on track. Therefore, students' ability to conceptualize their learning and monitor their own progress is restricted. The use of conference notes, exit slips, and summaries of teaching points for timely adjustments to instruction to meet the needs of all learners is not sufficiently in place.

# Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

| School name: Isaac Bildersee | UD | D | P | WD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |

| Instructional Core | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school regularly…* | UD | D | P | WD |
| 1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards? | | | | X |
| 1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations? | | | 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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection? | | | 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 |