Quality Review Report

2013-2014

NYC iSchool

High School M376

131 Avenue of the Americas
New York
NY 10013

Principal: Isora Bailey

Dates of review: March 17, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Safiyah Satterwhite

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

NYC iSchool is a high school with 433 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 18% Black, 42% Hispanic, 27% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and staff provide robust, standards-aligned curricula that embed rigorous habits and opportunities for all students to demonstrate their thinking resulting in college preparedness. (1.1)

    - The focus of the school's curricula is to provide students with the necessary experiences for high school graduation, college acceptance and college success with a particular emphasis on Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) preparation. To this end, Common Core (CC) aligned curricula promote college readiness, skills and habits for all students. The NYC iSchool has a unique structure whereas courses of study are designed by each teacher based on student interests and need. School courses change every quarter based to student selection and data analysis. Teachers spend significant time customizing and planning all guides and instructional materials to ensure CC alignment and integration of instructional shifts via a robust standards mapping system to meet the needs of all students and provide coherence across the grade levels. Course offerings at the school include Revolutionary Playwriting, Journalism, International Public Policy, Nuclear Proliferation, Food Revolution, Keeping History Alive, Forensics, Robotics and others. Students partake in interdisciplinary modules, 9 week challenge-based units centered on a real world challenge to support the development of 21st century skills, core high school curricula classes for graduation requirements, and online coursework for personalized learning. Every grade offers a unified set of courses designed to norm grade level experiences. To complement these experiences, students have the opportunity to choose from United States and Global History, Physical and Life Science and English-based module courses, as well as a number of courses in the arts, foreign language, music, and technology. Furthermore, students are provided Google notebooks to access school curricula and academic tasks online. Additionally, teachers design rigorous courses to spark student interests and create activities intended to instill in students a love for learning. For example, the school uses a "Planning a Core Experience" Guide for teachers that includes a planned "elevator" speech and course description for the student course selection process, a final assessment of learning (mastery assessment) crafted to ensure that all students demonstrate thinking, an overview of the content and skills which students will gain in the course and the methodology of instructional material delivery. Teachers are required to ensure that students have at least two opportunities "along the way" to demonstrate mastery of learning objectives and each learning objective is to be explicitly assessed in the final assessment. For example, in one course the mastery assignment was to create and present an Environmental Action Plan grounded in research that has been conducted throughout the coursework. These rigorous exercises and curricula that encourage students to think have aided in student average SAT scores rising from a 479 last-year to 540 this year and above average Regents pass rates, such as 90+% pass rate in English and Living Environment.

- School leaders successfully allocate resources to support school goals and strategically program students and teachers to foster accountable collaborations and promote college readiness. (1.3)

    - The school's belief system around choice and responsibility lies at the core of its programming methods. The NYC iSchool champions that if students are interested in their work, they will do better. To this end, students are programmed into

classes based on their unique needs and by their interests. Students complete interest surveys throughout the year and select, as well as propose, courses of study. Teacher preference surveys are uniquely crafted so that teachers can express what courses they want to teach resulting in a customized curriculum and learning plan and often collaborate with students on course titles and content to ensure that student interests and needs are met. Diagnostic assessments are provided to students frequently to ensure that necessary core courses and labs designed to build skills are also provided to students. For example, one student in the school receives three labs in his quarterly schedule; Reading Lab, U.S History Lab and Mathematics Lab all customized to support his skill development. Classes as well as skill interventions very often will still occur even if there is only one student in need of the support. This individualized approach helps to ensure that all students, including special education students are successful resulting in a grade point average rise of special education students from 76% last year to 81% this year. To further support the schools goals and action plans, per session funds exceeding $10,000 has been allocated for teachers to plan activities and build curriculum. The principal hired four special education teachers, each assigned to an academic department and Integrated Co-Teaching classes were placed in 9th and 10th grade to further support special education students. The school has purchased green screens, microphones, equipment, stands, software, lighting and other materials to support students in demonstrating learning through documentaries. Additionally, the school has obtained $14,000 to provide computers to students and support school-wide projects and courses. For instance, due to the funding provided to support the Polluted Planet course, students were able to create a biodiversity action plan proposal and an energy and climate action plan amongst other environmental initiatives resulting in an award from Eco Schools. Parents express passion about aiding the school in its fundraising efforts and have committed to raising over two million dollars to support the establishment of a green roof; a project spearheaded by the student body. In addition to parent input, many of the school's initiatives are developed from continuous surveys filled out by students and the teaching staff resulting in an invested community that holds itself accountable for student progress.

- The school creates a safe supportive learning environment that is informed by a clear theory of action and provides coordinated support that impacts student academic and personal behaviors (1.4)

    - The NYC iSchool believes that every action the school takes should be developmentally appropriate for students and that all systems of the school should be built on the foundation of choice and responsibility. Therefore, together faculty members, students and parents develop the iSchool curricula, policies and structures through collaborative planning and culture building. For example, through an assignment students partnered with architects and ecologists to design and present a green roof project that sought to make the school more environmentally friendly. This project sprung from an in-class assignment to a student body group leading a real project that now involves funders, city elected officials, school alumni and parents. The school intentionally reaches out to recent graduates to obtain data on how the school can enhance its college preparedness work and student voice. In these surveys, students consistently exclaim how prepared they feel after graduation. For example, one student stated, "The iSchool was probably the best thing that ever happened to me with regards to preparing me for college. I'm not sure if it was the fact that we were able to choose our own classes when it came to making up credits, or AP Literature which prepared me for all this paper writing, but the iSchool certainly prepared me for college". Students have learned college and career aligned academic and personal behaviors that

are reinforced through student-led conferences intended to build 21st century skills and habits. In addition to a guidance and college counselor on site, advisory structures play a prominent role. Teachers meet with students whom they advise three times per week and coordinate any support students may need to experience success. A computer system, Naviance, is used to create personalized learning plans and assessments and a college readiness curriculum, written by a college advisor, is followed in the 11th and 12th grade advisories. Students receive "Shout Outs" from teachers; small postcards sent home and can be selected for Honor Roll based on performance. Students propose clubs and select advisors. Active student groups include Student Council, iCare, peer tutoring, Model United Nations, a rock band, and a jazz ensemble. Students clearly have a voice through several surveys and channels in which student feedback is sought out and used to guide school decisions. Student Council has organized events such as game night, movie night, a school dance, and a March Madness basketball tournament. The iCare group has conducted fundraising for Operation Christmas Child, distributed hot chocolate in the mornings, conducted a Random Acts of Kindness campaign, and improved the boys' and girls' bathrooms. In student interviews, students express the power of their student government and the inclusivity of school leaders. These actions help to demonstrate that the school has inclusive structures in place that illicit student voice, personalize supports and prepare students for college and life success.

- The school provides a clear portrait of student mastery via teacher-created rubrics and grading policies aligned to school curricula that provide meaningful feedback to all regarding student performance. (2.2)

    - Grading policies, rubrics and assessments are aligned to curricula and used to provide meaningful feedback regarding student achievement. Every class administers a wide array of assessments to gauge student understanding of the instructional content; these assessments are called Mastery Demonstrations. Via Mastery Demonstrations teachers establish a clear guideline of what students need to be able to do to master a particular skill and standard. Other assessments provided by teachers are productivity assessments, which include, homework and class assignments, class preparation scores and others. The grading policy places the most weight on mastery to ensure that grades truly represent what students know and are able to do. Teachers are expected to clearly identify the standards/ skills for which students did not show mastery enabling the school to have a clear picture of student performance. Goals are designed for students based on the results of these assessments. All teachers track mastery for their students and students cannot move to the next level without demonstrating this mastery. These systems, which serve to provide a clear picture of student performance, have aided teachers in making effective curricula adjustments such as re-arranging and modifying a scope and sequence and creating individualized, personal curriculum for students. These moves have resulted in special education students obtaining an 80% 4-year graduation rate compared to a 30% 4-year NYCDOE graduation rate.

- Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher practice thus strengthening teacher capacity and instructional coherence that results in mastery of goals for groups of students. (4.2)

    - Teacher teams meet weekly and use research-based strategies from "The Power of Teacher Teams" and "The Power of Protocols" to guide their work. Teachers conduct professional development through team meetings to support each other in the areas of developing supports, strategies and scaffolds across content areas to

reach struggling learners. During team work, each teacher becomes a content area expert and guides teachers in identifying the "struggling learners" in their course. Student data is analyzed and triangulated to see if there are crossover skills that could be weak in a variety of subjects. This skill- based approach aids teachers in better identifying specific deficiencies that can be supported to result in greater student success. For example, in the mathematics department, master skills, such as using graphing calculators appropriately as a tool, and persevering and solving a problem are identified to ensure that across the department these skills are infused in every subject and results are tracked using the tracker. Mastery is compiled from informal and formal assessment data per student and teacher practice is adjusted based on these results. For instance, data reviewed in a teacher team revealed that students struggled with the distance formula and how it is derived from the Pythagorean theorem. Therefore, the teacher created a video about how the theorem worked, however, exit tickets revealed that less than 60% of students mastered the skill. With the support of colleagues, this prompted the teacher to do a re-teach through an investigation so that students could derive the formula themselves resulting in over 90% mastery. Additional strategies used as a result of team work and data analysis have been to: create an Algebra-1 boot camp geared at common deficiencies, embed audio/video recordings and recorders as instructional materials, as well as highlighted annotated print materials. Teachers keep mastery data on every student and use colors to demonstrate when a student has reached mastery. This data is passed along to other teachers as student's progress and further illustrates a coherent system that tracks and increases goal achievement for all learners.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen instructional strategies to strategically provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions into the curricula resulting in high levels of student thinking and ownership for all learners. (1.2)

    - The iSchool believes that students learn best when they understand the relevance of their work and can recognize their individual needs and growth. To enact this philosophy the school uses the workshop model. Classroom practices consist of varied instructional strategies whereas in some cases students work independently, receive direct instruction, work in groups and/or engage in deep discussion in order to provide multiple entry points for learning and suitable scaffolds. In a math class, students were grouped heterogeneously to find the roots of a parabolic function graphically. A high achieving student, selected to be a teacher's assistant, provided support to students in need and the general classroom teacher circulated to provide modeling for struggling students. In another class, students engaged in a deep discussion around "The Bluest Eye" text as students argued, "Who is to blame for Pecola's fate at the end of the Bluest Eye?" Accelerated students in this activity were charged with leading the small-group discussion and inviting quieter students to share their thinking. This open ended activity helped to reinforce the school's belief that curricula tasks should be accessible to all students. However, although apparent in this course, teacher questioning that fostered high levels of student participation and embodied opportunities for students to challenge one another's thinking was not evident to the same extent across the vast majority of classrooms. Furthermore, extensions for high achievers and strategic multiple entry points were not consistently embedded in classroom practice. These moves hinder the school from maximizing the outcomes of classroom practice resulting in fewer opportunities for all student work products to reflect high quality and consistent high levels of thinking.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: NYC iSchool	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**