

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

International Community High School

High School 07X334

**345 BROOK AVENUE
BRONX
NY 10454**

Principal: BERENA CABARCAS

**Dates of review: Dec. 11-12, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

International Community High School is a high school with 385 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 18% Black, 74% Hispanic, 1% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 80% English language learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 82.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal aligns resources, staffing and program groupings to attain the school's goals and foster engagement in meaningful learning projects to close the achievement gap. (1.3)
 - The school, whose population comprises 100% recently arrived English language learners (ELL's) of whom at least 45 percent are overage lacking full native language literacy, has marshaled a wide array of resources, including schedules, technology, coaches and partnerships to advance its instructional and organizational goals. Given the school's belief that ELL's need additional time for processing language and its commitment to project-based learning, classes are 60 minutes long, with timer-supported pacing that ensures class time is typically well spent. Each semester culminates in students' oral presentations of a rigorous digital portfolio to a panel of students, faculty, outside evaluators and their parents, a requirement that students find extremely challenging and which they credit for inspiring them to work hard on topics they select. Students in their junior year participate in an internship program that provides them with practical job skills at over 30 sites, along with formal instruction in the job market and labor law and in developing resumes and letter-writing and interviewing skills. Partnerships with numerous community-based organizations help students and their families, to navigate the complexities of their new environment. For example, after an analysis of discharged students revealed an over-representation of West African females, the school partnered with Sauti Yetu which is helping to reinforce the value of education to families. These supports ensure that students successfully produce meaningful work products and prepare themselves for college and careers.
 - Interdisciplinary teams share a cohort of approximately 90 students across the four core subjects. Teams then loop with their students within the Junior (grades 9 and 10) and Senior (grades 11 and 12) institutes, which encourages close relationships with students over time. These teachers, who meet in vertical and horizontal teams, hold themselves fully accountable for the progress of their cohort, collaboratively analyzing their written work and mastery of learning objectives across subject areas, and strategizing about how to meet their needs. A third of the teachers are new to the school this year, having passed the scrutiny of the joint faculty-administrative hiring team that reviewed their performance and their teaching portfolios. Newly assigned teachers participate in scoring Regents exams and a week of professional development in the summer as a way of acculturating them to the school's norms. Students are grouped homogeneously one period a day for well-planned interventions or enrichment in their area of highest need and interest. These practices reinforce the faculty's commitment to the mission of the school and supports closing the achievement gap.
- Teachers make good use of data from common assessments across content areas to measure mastery and inform instructional adjustments that meet the needs of diverse learners. (2.2)
 - The school has a standards-based grading policy, based on principles outlined in O'Connor's *Fifteen Fixes for Broken Grades* that provides separate scores for academic achievement and academic behaviors.

Teachers articulate learning outcomes in language from either the Consortium’s rubric or the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), and track student mastery in a versatile and highly accessible electronic system called JumpRope. This ensures that classroom grades accurately reflect performance, and informs the design of additional supports to address particular areas of need at the class, small group or individual level. The alignment of assessments to clear Common Core aligned objectives embedded in the curriculum is exemplary in the math department, where student outcomes on Regents exams have surged. Teachers typically provide feedback on drafts, focusing on thesis, evidence and analysis on the first draft, followed by feedback on language use in the second, so that students can properly address substantive issues. The social studies team has developed a sophisticated “line item” approach, coding items by content, visual- and linguistic demand, providing greater insight into the nature of the challenges students face. That information, together with student goal-setting has guided curriculum development and enabled the school to increase the passing rate on the Global Regents from 15% several years ago to 47% last year.

- All teachers conduct checks for understanding, ascertaining levels of learning by circulating amongst different groups of students and conferencing to provide individual feedback. In addition, teachers use exit slips to inform instruction. For example, in an Algebra II class, misconceptions that emerged from the previous day were addressed through well-designed tasks strategically assigned to sets of students who then attained success through deep thinking and collaboration. A skilled paraprofessional designed an “on the spot” extension to further challenge the students in her group. Individual conferencing during the Reading Plus intervention, a web-based reading program that resulted in 20 point gains in the English Regents amongst the pilot students last year, ensures ongoing cycles of goal setting and evaluation so that each student knows and works on their next step. Students regularly self-assess using rubrics, student-conducted item analysis, and reflection to identify next steps and seek suitable resources. As a result of these practices, teachers are able to adjust instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- Teacher teams engage in structured professional collaborations that promote a culture of data-driven inquiry and expand teaching repertoires to build leadership skills and enhance student learning. (4.2)
 - All teachers engage in structured, professional collaborations, at the department level and grade-level, using a common protocol to examine student work to determine how well it aligns to the standards and instructional shifts. For example, the social studies team scrutinized how well a student marshaled evidence for her claim and concluded that a previously designed scaffold known as MEAL (main idea, evidence, analysis, and links) had actually constrained her expression. Consequently, they developed an extension to move students from report-writing style to argument writing. Teams develop and track goals at the individual and grade level, and are now coordinating efforts to increase the number of students successfully completing their two annual portfolio presentations from 70 percent to 85 percent.
 - The school highly values the principle of distributive leadership, using the principle of “localized autonomy” to promote the authority of teachers to research and adapt successful instructional practices and tasks.

Teachers also serve in a vertical leadership team, bringing coherence to efforts undertaken by the portfolio, technology and advisory/community services committees, and which also serves to expand new initiatives. For example, the successful use of “circles” in advisory is now expanding across all departments, where students prepare notes for a debate on a substantive issue, such as “Is it possible to have a civilization without a social structure?” Outside experts support these teams, listening carefully to the issues that arise to provide feedback and guidance to the team, as well as shoulder-to-shoulder support to new teachers, and communicating informally with the principal and assistant principal weekly, and monthly in a formal review. Teachers report they highly value the school’s collaborative “one learning model for all” as a way to improve their inquiry practice, leadership skills and contribute to the school’s success.

- Strong systems for collaborative decision-making generates coherent approaches to adjusting curriculum and instruction, school culture and team work which result in continual refinement of school practices. (5.1)
 - The school has strong vertical and horizontal team structures to evaluate and refine curricula, instructional approaches and assessments so that best practices migrate quickly across departments. The school’s participation in the Common Core pilot two years ago, and last year’s school wide focus on lesson planning has resulted in uniform structures for unit and lesson design across departments. In addition, to build on the math department’s exemplary work in articulating and assessing standards-based outcomes, the chair now serves as the school’s lead teacher, supporting other departments in constructing clear CCLS-aligned objectives and designing activities and tasks that support their attainment. As a result, unit outcomes across the school have become clearer, providing students greater opportunities to be exposed to tasks that prepare them to meet higher standards. Department leaders used a curriculum analysis tool that cross-references the Consortium rubric with the CCLS to evaluate units and lesson plans last year, and are currently further revising units to ensure these align more closely with criteria from the tri-state rubric and principles from Quality Teaching of English Language (QTEL). The school has also cross-referenced the Consortium rubric with the CCLS and created a matrix between the Consortium’s instructional expectations and the Danielson Framework for Teaching, to identify gaps and transition smoothly to the new evaluation criteria. Together, these embedded systems equip the school to meet the expectations of college and career readiness for all students.
 - In response to teacher feedback, the school has developed uniform approaches to discipline and guidance so that all students are aware of behavioral expectations and available services. Expectations are posted in hallways and discussed in advisory, and guidance meets with all teacher teams, which have an advisory/community service representative, regularly. Student voice is sought through “circles” based on principles of restorative justice as well as through the peer mediation program and reflection, poster- and video-production around the school’s core values. To ensure access to student and teacher work across the curriculum, all documents are now posted in a Google Drive, and all teachers have access to laptops or iPads that they use well to document their efforts and student achievement. Frequent evaluation of organizational practices has resulted in fluid mechanisms to incorporate student voice in decision-making, including choice in physical education, internship, intervention and

enrichment activities. Parents' voice lives in such decisions as that to undertake a survey to identify the root cause of attendance problems. The structures that promote constant cycles of data gathering and action enable the school to act quickly upon emerging organizational needs.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen academic tasks so that learning outcomes fully reflect the standards and instructional shifts to ensure high rigor and cognitive engagement across all subjects, to increase achievement for all students. (1.1)
 - The school is well along in its process of aligning units and outcomes to the CCLS, using uniform backward-design templates that identify essential questions; content, language and skills objectives; assessments and resources. This has been achieved fully in mathematics, through good adaptations of content from the EngageNY modules and the use of challenging, experiential tasks that build strong conceptual understanding. Procedural fluency is enhanced through multiple computation drills called “sprints”, while application is embedded in both daily tasks and substantive portfolio assignments, such as the “can” task that requires students to present a business proposal to maximize *volume* while minimizing *surface area* of a cylinder and the “pipe” task that requires students to actually build and test a pipe system. A special interdisciplinary newcomers' curriculum, developed by the City University of New York, promotes literacy and numeracy skills for approximately 20 mostly overage students who enter with only minimal schooling in their native language. However, implementation of the instructional shifts in the regular English curricula is less thorough than in math. While all units specify some language objectives, including vocabulary acquisition, the selection of target vocabulary, especially for beginning ELLs, is not purposeful enough to accelerate language development as evidenced by a review of the tasks included in the English curriculum. In addition, the school has not set curricular goals in relation to text complexity, and some new teachers have not yet acquired the skills to enable them to design curricula and rigorous tasks that reflect sufficiently high expectations for text-based evidence. While there are excellent models within the school to build upon, curricula and tasks do not consistently enable all students to engage in rigorous thinking across all content areas in preparation for post secondary work.
- Refine pedagogical practices that foster the school's core values so that across all classes students have meaningful opportunities for productive collaboration and structured discussion. (1.2)
 - The school has historically used a rubric from its consortium to guide pedagogical practices that promote collaboration and experiential learning, which it has cross-referenced with the Danielson Framework for Teaching and which serves as the teachers' guide for quality instruction. Across all classrooms, teachers provide multiple scaffolds, including graphic organizers, audio-visual supports, and sentence-starters, to provide access points for students who are at different levels in English language acquisition as well as different levels of native language literacy. The school's instructional focus on language development is evident in the common approach to vocabulary acquisition, where students learn general academic and content-specific terms through drawings, definitions, examples and producing sentences using these terms in context. In addition, student groups are formed purposely to

include speakers of different languages to minimize reliance on native language, except for the most recent arrivals, who are paired with a partner for smooth transition. Anticipation guides that build metacognitive skills accompany problems that require real-life applications of mathematical principles. Despite the core belief in collaborative learning and language development, there were few teaching strategies used to offer opportunities to all students, especially in the lower grades, to practice producing language through choral or cloze reading, sentence frames, substantive vocabulary or repetition. Consequently, there were missed opportunities for students to discuss their thinking in some classes. As a result, there are variations in the levels of student participation that constrain the school's ability to accelerate student learning to the fullest extent possible.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: International Community High School	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Instructional Core				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	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				
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	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				
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	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	