

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Herbert K. Eisenberg

Intermediate School K303

**501 West Avenue
Brooklyn
NY, 11224**

Principal: Carmen Amador

**Date of review: February 9, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Steven Chernigoff**

The School Context

Herbert K. Eisenberg is a middle school with 525 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 16% Black, 32% Hispanic, 32% White, and 19% Asian students. The student body includes 13% 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 2013-2014 was 92.6%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Findings	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that all curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). (1.1a, b)

Impact

The school's curricular decisions result in coherence across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students. They also result in students being challenged to think on their own, devise solutions to problems, and be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula in all subjects, including the school's themed enrichment course News Literacy, are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards, and incorporate the instructional shifts. English and social studies units include central texts, writing tasks, major concepts, resource alignment, multiple entry points for SWDs and ELLs, as well as enrichment for higher achieving students. Additionally, there is an alignment between the social studies curriculum and Arts Engage. For enrichment, the science curriculum utilizes Mannahatta 2409 an interactive program for increasing environmental awareness.
- Teachers and school leaders reflected upon existing English language arts (ELA) curricula from Expeditionary Learning and made a strategic decision to adjust it for sixth and eighth grades to promote greater coherence and to incorporate the instructional shifts. Teachers felt that students needed more reading of non-fiction informational texts, studying academic vocabulary, and writing to sources, earlier in the year. Sixth grade classes now begin with Close Reading and Writing to Learn (Module 1) so that teachers can work with students to develop those skills early in the year, and then study Research, Decision Making and Forming Positions, (Module 4),. The ELA curriculum is now aligned with social studies and science in both grades, as the topic of Module 4 is "Insecticides: Costs vs. Benefits" in sixth grade and "Sustainability of the World's Food Supply" in eighth grade. Students read the non-fiction texts *Frightful Mountain* and *The Omnivores Dilemma* in sixth and eighth grade ELA respectively, research the topics, and write extended response essays, with an emphasis on citing evidence from the text. In math, teachers and school leaders decided to change the curriculum from CMP3 to EngageNY, which they feel is more rigorous.
- Lessons plans incorporate the workshop model and include essential questions, guiding questions, and strategic groupings differentiated thoughtfully, with a variety of levels of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions, to challenge all learners. In a seventh grade science class studying chemical bonds, students were asked to identify and compare the physical properties of sodium and chlorine; draw conclusions on why most elements tend to bond chemically with other elements; and develop a logical argument about whether sharing or complete transfer of electrons is the best way towards stability. An eighth grade math class was asked to translate verbal phrases into algebraic equations/math sentences. Students connected real-world problems such as how much money to save over a given time to then be able to afford to buy an object. This helps them understand the representations/equations they are asked to write.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies, that are aligned with the school's curricula. Common assessments are used to determine student progress.

Impact

The school's assessments provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement, and are used to adjust curriculum and instruction. However, feedback at times is not always offered at opportune times to ensure that students use the information to improve their work.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and in-class assessments such as checklists, pre- and post-tests, one-to-one conferencing with students, exit tickets, post-it slips with glows and grows, and student self-assessment, which provide actionable feedback to students about their work.
- Rubrics for grading student work are aligned with the school's curricula. Teachers use grade- or subject-wide rubrics or devise their own. Rubrics allow teachers to assess student work for content learning as well as mastery of the writing standards. While the vast majority of student work observed received teacher feedback, it tended to be in response to final drafts, therefore precluding students from adjusting their work in progress. ELLs in sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes received targeted feedback on their work; while SWDs in eighth grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) social studies class received feedback about their work, SWDs in sixth grade ICT social studies did not all receive feedback.
- Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) baselines, periodic assessments, as well as unit pre- and post-assessments are utilized effectively by the school to get an understanding of students' present level of performance and to adjust curricula and instruction. But feedback from these common assessments does not yet evidence uniformity of delivery to students with sufficient explicit comments about strengths, weaknesses, and next steps. A seventh grade Expeditionary Learning end-of-unit assessment around the novel *A Long Walk to Water* utilized a common rubric to assess seven writing traits. But the feedback consisted of circled boxes on the rubric indicating the score received and insufficient comments from the teacher regarding why the essay received the score that it did and how to improve it.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Common instructional strategies across classes and grades provide students access to the curriculum, allow them to study subjects in depth, and engage in high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers utilize strategic methods to engage students, such as the workshop model and the Socratic Seminar. In a sixth grade ICT social studies class one teacher utilized a SMART board to model highlighting key words and phrases in a text about the achievements of ancient Egyptians. Students then worked in groups to read an article and gather evidence for a graphic organizer which would be used later to write an extended response. Sometimes the modelling is by students, as in a sixth grade English class. Here, the class observed a small group of students in a fishbowl setting discussing the advantages and disadvantages of spraying DDT to prevent the spread of malaria, which they learned from watching a short film. The rest of the class then discussed how well the fishbowl students supported their opinions about DDT with evidence from the film and understood what the film was trying to communicate.
- Discussions showed coherent teaching practices across classes in a grade. In News Literacy class the teacher utilizes a school-wide strategy for evaluating sources: IMVAIN (Independent, Multiple, Authoritative, Verifiable, Independent and Named). The sixth grade ELA teacher asked the students to evaluate the use of multiple sources (the film and written texts) to make a judgment about using DDT. She asked students to tie this activity to their News Literacy class by asking, “Did using different sources help? Why? How do you know [the information in the film] is true?” An eighth grade ICT English class teacher asked students to utilize math reasoning to analyze the cost and benefits of eating genetically modified foods vs. non-GMOs.
- Teachers facilitate discussion and encourage students to find answers from one another. The school has a rule, “Two before me.” Students must seek out answers to their questions from two other sources, such as other students, the text, or through technology. In eighth grade math, students moved from their groups to ask classmates to explain how to solve a problem, while their teacher worked with students who needed individualized help. In a seventh grade science class, one student was keeping an eye on his classmate and then told him why his chemical bond diagram was not correct, “It’s eight [electrons]! You have [only] seven!” A student in another group explained to her partner how to make the atom in sodium chloride stable.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate to the entire community high expectations that are connected to college and career and offer ongoing feedback to families.

Impact

The school's high expectations create an atmosphere of professionalism for staff both inside and outside the classroom, regarding instruction to students and adult learning. Thus, families understand student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff handbook outlines detailed expectations to all who work at IS 303 and the school holds orientation sessions for new teachers and staff. High expectations are aligned to the Danielson framework and teachers are responsible for incorporating the detailed feedback into their practice. Furthermore, teachers take charge of their own learning by creating an extensive calendar of classroom inter-visitations to improve their practice. The process includes a pre-visit meeting in which teachers discuss goals and expectations for the lesson, and goals for their own learning. Administrators support this protocol by providing coverages of classes as well as identifying classrooms with best practices. After each visit, teachers meet again to review their findings, learnings, and next steps. Teachers also share out their noticings with each other during grade-level team and professional learning community meetings, colleagues adopt others' best practices, and administrators weigh in as suitable.
- The school's motto of "High Expectations, children first, no excuses" is taken seriously by all constituents and is communicated clearly to students and families. Students know that they are being prepared for high school, and college and career through courses such as News Literacy, the real-world problems and applications that they solve in class, and the school's emphasis on preparing students for jobs in the 21st century. The school's name, "Academy for Career Exploration," comes to life as students have the opportunity to apply for jobs assisting teachers or administrators. This helps them understand the process of creating a resume, filling out a job application, and presenting themselves in an interview. Students wear name tags with their job during the day so that they can be identified by other students and serve as an example to them. Students also learn about financial literacy, participate in Mannahatta 2409, an environmental science project to create a virtual world, and a variety of arts programs that lead students to see the connections between middle school, higher learning, and the job world.
- Families are engaged in the life of the school and receive frequent feedback from teachers to help them understand their children's progress. The school hosts many events to explain the Common Core Learning Standards to parents and how to help their children do their homework. Teachers also explain the Common Core Learning Standards individually to parents during in-school conferences and on the phone. Teachers call parents frequently to update them on how their children are doing and tell them about the additional supports that are being provided. Parents reported very good communication from 303. The school's use of Engrade, School Messenger, and individual teacher newsletters, help parents know their children's progress. Saturday adult literacy and English as a Second Language classes help parents learn English and understand the shifts of the Common Core.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations, with distributed leadership practices embedded.

Impact

Teachers’ professional collaborations strengthen their instructional capacity and promote implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, including the instructional shifts, resulting in school-wide coherence and increasing student achievement.. Distributed leadership structures result in teacher leadership capacity and a voice in key decisions within the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Working in teams, teachers recognized that the school’s curricula were not meeting their students’ needs. So they asked the administration to change the ELA curriculum to Expeditionary Learning and the math to EngageNY from CMP3. Teacher teams further refined curricula to incorporate scaffolds as well as more challenging work for higher performing students. The ELA curricula now connect more coherently to science and social studies.
- Subject area teams, led by teachers, meet weekly to look at student work, plan collaboratively, and revise curricula. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet every Monday during after-school professional learning time; teachers have choices of what PLCs to attend, based on their area of interest. On Tuesdays, teacher teams engage in collaborative inquiry around one or a small group of students. The sixth grade math team looks at student work, identifies strategies to help high, medium, and lower-performing students learn better; adjust curriculum and lesson plans; and share best practices, including how to support ELLs and SWDs. Teachers discussed providing more scaffolding to ELLs, such as writing instructions more explicitly and providing more vocabulary to help them understand the material and justify their answers when solving equations.
- Asking students to justify their answers, as opposed to merely explaining it, is a school-wide practice developed in teacher teams. Not only did teacher teams agree to ask students to justify their own answers but students must justify why their classmate’s answer is incorrect. This promotes discussion, argumentation and citing evidence, and develops students’ vocabulary. Teacher teams are seeing evidence of improved skills among special populations and all students through this school-wide practice.
- Tuesday afternoon case conferencing allows teachers from various disciplines to look at a particular ELL student’s work and devise strategies to help improve his writing, participation and reading level on in-class assessments. All teachers adopted the strategy of moving the student to the center of the classroom to increase his interactions with other students and participation. This increased the student’s confidence to participate, express his ideas verbally and also in writing. As he felt more comfortable in his environment and developed good vocabulary skills, his reading level and class grades improved by an average of five points.