Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

# 2014-2015

**The Isobel Rooney School**

**Middle School X080**

**149 East Mosholu Parkway**
**Bronx**
**NY 10467**

**Principal: Emmanuel Polanco**

**Date of review: March 26, 2015**
**Lead Reviewer: Melodie Mashel**

# The School Context

The Isobel Rooney School is a middle school with 654 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 15% Black, 66% Hispanic, 6% White, 12% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 32% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.0%.

# School Quality Criteria

| **Instructional Core** | | |
|---|---|---|
| *To what extent does the school…* | **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 | **Additional Findings** | **Developing** |
| 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 | **Focus** | **Developing** |
| 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 | **Additional Findings** | **Developing** |
| **School Culture** | | |
| *To what extent does the school…* | **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** | **Developing** |
| **Systems for Improvement** | | |
| *To what extent does the school…* | **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 | **Celebration** | **Developing** |

## Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
Teachers participate in structured collaborations to examine student work. Teacher engagement in key decisions regarding student learning is an emerging practice.

**Impact**
The school's structures for team data analysis and professional collaborations are evolving, thus promoting teacher participation in lead roles.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Using an Atlas protocol, teachers analyze student work and determine student strength and challenges. For example, during an observed interdisciplinary meeting, teachers analyzed work across subjects produced by an English language learner. Teacher findings indicated that the student's use of transitional words needed to be evident across content areas other than English language arts. However, teacher teams did not fully address the instructional strategies to embed in their own practice that provided the student with support.

- Teacher teams review students' electronic portfolios to gauge student progress over time. For example, during an observed team meeting, teachers analyzed a student's writing piece at the beginning of the year compared to the student's mid line writing. The analysis of student work overtime informed teachers that the student had made progress. However, teachers did not determine curricular modifications or instructional strategies that provided the student with support to elevate the level of the work beyond standard levels.

- Teacher leaders who represent each discipline meet weekly with the school's instructional coaches to share instructional practices and adjust tasks. For example, teachers expressed that they often break down task for students or modify the pace of units to meet student needs. Teachers, however, did not indicate instructional moves they would change.

- Teachers expressed that they provide input about teacher practice. However, a review of minutes from a teacher team meeting indicates recommendations made do not yet fully affect student learning. For example, a next step identified during the teacher team process was for the student to highlight sequencing and transitional words with minimal reference to building teacher practice.

## Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
Teacher use of high level questions and implementing multiple entry points is an emerging practice. Teachers are beginning to use strategies to engage students in discussions.

**Impact**
Across classrooms, scaffolds that provide all students with access to curricula and lessons and teacher questioning that promotes student high level thinking is inconsistent, thus hindering students from engaging in deep discussions and resulting in uneven production and quality of student work.

**Supporting Evidence**

- In some classrooms visited, teachers posed high level questions. For example, in a grade 7 science class, students were expected to answer the question, “How does cell reproduction lead to the continuation and evolution of a species?” This question required students to analyze and synthesize what they had researched and learned. However, in another classroom visited, students were asked, “What is density?” This question required students to simply recall a definition.

- English language learners and special education students were expected to engage in the same challenging tasks as their peers. In some classrooms, students had access to leveled texts, and teachers strategically grouped students. However, in other classrooms, texts were not varied, and the use of fluid groupings to ensure entry for students was not evident.

- Student group discussions were evident in some classrooms visited. For example, in a grade 8 social studies class, students were required to read short text articles, discuss in groups whether women were valued during World War II, and to provide an explanation of their thinking. In a grade 6 social studies classroom, students studying the factors in the decline of a society were not provided with ample time to discuss the topic of study.

- Students produce persuasive essays and cite evidence to support their claims. For example, students were required to write a persuasive essay explaining the impact World War II had on minorities and cite evidence from various passages read. However, much of the student written work is limited to this genre, and writing across a variety of genres is not yet fully evident.

# Additional Findings

| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
School leaders and staff are continuing to align their curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards, and academic tasks are beginning to emphasize higher order skills across grades levels and content areas and for all learners.

**Impact**
The alignment of curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards has not yet yielded coherent curricula across grades and disciplines, thus hindering some students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, from engaging in challenging rigorous tasks that elevates thinking and prepares students for college and career.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and staff have worked to align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards. The school has adopted components of *Expeditionary Learning* and designed their own units incorporating some instructional shifts. The school's English language arts units focus primarily on reading informational text and writing units that develop students' opinion and persuasive writing, embed the Common Core, and integrate essential questions, standards to be addressed and skills to be taught. However, other than a core text, units do not yet include a wide range of leveled texts that deepen students' understanding of unit concepts via independent reading.
- A review of the school's curricula maps demonstrates that the school is in the process of creating units that are content specific and coherent across disciplines. For example, the school's grade 6 science curriculum map captures overarching topics of study. However, New York State content standards are yet to be fully embedded for all content topics of study.
- Instructional tasks do not yet universally align to the depth required by the shifts. For example, in a social studies lesson plan, students were expected to discuss and create a written argument that would support their stance on the question of whether women and/or minorities were valued during World War II. However, in another social studies lesson plan, a written task required students to identify the factors that led to the decline of Timbuktu. This task required students to simply recall information from the text.

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Developing |
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**Findings**
A common grading system and rubrics aligned to curricula is emerging. The school is beginning to use checks for understanding to assess student progress.

**Impact**
The school's inconsistent grading policies and use of non-task specific rubrics limits students from clearly understanding the precise criteria needed to elevate work to standard levels, thus hindering students from receiving feedback that promotes high achievement levels. Lack of coherence in the use of checks for understanding hinders consistent effective instructional adjustments.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school uses a range of assessments including performance assessment tasks and periodic assessments. End of unit tests are used in some content areas to gauge student progress.

- A review of student work reveals teacher actionable feedback is not yet fully aligned to specific task criteria. For example, a student articulated that he understood his work was good because the teacher wrote a comment praising the work. However, a review of the work did not reveal written comments that would support the student in raising the level of the work.

- Teachers use a generic interdisciplinary learning rubric to assess student work. The same rubric is used for all grades, subjects and tasks. While students were clear on the purpose of a rubric, during the student meeting, students stated that they were unclear as to how to use rubric criteria to elevate the quality of work for both their persuasive and narrative writing samples.

- Visits to classrooms reveal some use of checks for understanding. For example, in a grade 8 social studies class, the teacher conferred with small groups of students to gain insight on what they learned from the lesson/s and their own research. However, in a grade 6 math class, the teacher moved from group to group focusing solely on student completion of the task.

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Developing |
|---|---|---|---|

**Findings**
School leaders are continuing to develop systems that articulate the expectations of the Danielson's Framework for Teaching to staff. A culture that messages the school's high expectations to families is emerging.

**Impact**
The school's systems and structures inconsistently message high expectations to teachers and families. The school is developing systems to hold stakeholders accountable and to ensure that parents understand their child's progress towards a college and career path.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders' frequent observation of teacher classroom practice and one to one conversations with teachers promote accountability for teaching expectations. School leaders' written Advance system feedback provides teachers with recommendations for elevating their practice. However, a review of the school's professional development plan reveals inconsistent structures for professional learning. Training does not yet provide teachers with clarity around the expectations of Danielson's Framework for Teaching or ensure that teachers have access to in depth cycles of support in areas of challenge.

- The school's expectations are messaged to staff via emails, newsletters and weekly teacher team meetings. However, some forms of communication served as reminders of items due and do not yet spotlight best practices that serve to broaden teachers' understanding of expected instructional practices.

- The school's use of Skedula and Pupil path serve as an ongoing messaging system for parents and students about student academic and personal growth. Parents stated that the principal is highly visible and maintains an open door policy, and that they are enthusiastic about the school's use of Google Classrooms to supplement instruction. While families articulated they are aware of the school's goals, they also voiced that they had limited knowledge of the expectations of Common Core Learning Standards and how to better prepare their children toward meeting the standards.