



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Irwin Altman Middle School 172

Middle School Q172

**81-14 257 Street
Queens
NY 11004**

Principal: Jeffrey Slivko

**Date of review: March 8, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

The School Context

Irwin Altman Middle School 172 is a middle school with 992 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 63% Asian, 10% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 13% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 17% students with disabilities. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 96.7%.

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	Additional Findings	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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Celebration	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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

There is a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, families and students. Effective communication of high expectations is connected to a path of college and career readiness.

Impact

Mutual accountability for high expectations is shared by the stakeholders. Parents along with staff play an active role in supporting students.

Supporting Evidence

- The entire school community consistently communicates high expectations through their professionalism, instruction, incorporation of the instructional shifts and the *Danielson Framework for Teaching*, sharing mutual accountability for those expectations. Parent workshops and professional training within the school uses a common language that promotes college and career. As stated in interviews with teachers, parents, and students, the school community has clear expectations for pedagogical and professional practice, further evident by verbal and written communication. When meeting with the parents all were aware of the school's mission to be the "educational center of the community." Grade 6 parents spoke of how the school conducted tours to articulating fifth grade students to middle school and give them an authentic view of the school in action. A post-tour discussion assesses student learning about the school and the observed expectation of student work and participation.
- Parents stated that their children are well prepared for high school and beyond, with the school emphasizing career and college readiness and are delighted with the rigorous curriculum and active student life, including a student council. One parent stated that it is made clear when parents observe instruction and ask questions that there are high expectations for every student. Parenting skills workshops provide strategies and tools for parents to support their children in achieving high expectations.
- Grade-level workshops are open to parents and students and presented by the parent coordinator, guidance counselors, and teachers addressing pertinent issues and strategies for addressing these issues. Also, there are grade 6 transition workshops, grade 8 high school articulation workshops to explain the process and provide specific information about schools, and grade 6 and 7 articulation workshops to provide strategies for building strong organizational skills and work habits that will result in outcomes to create additional opportunities for student eligibility for criteria-based high school programs. Students are building strong organizational skills and good work habits that are evident in classrooms and through feedback at the Quality Review teacher meeting when teachers discussed reinforcement of these student skills and an improved awareness of their own responsibility in the learning process toward career and college.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Teaching strategies that provide scaffolds, extensions and multiple entry points for diverse students vary across classrooms.

Impact

While teaching practices are aligned across most classrooms with the school's beliefs of how students learn best, there are some missed opportunities to engage all students in challenging tasks that enable students to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms visited, teachers provided small-group instruction. In some classes, students participated in discussion by responding to teacher-generated questions; however, in other classrooms, some tasks did not require in-depth analysis, peer-to-peer interaction, or extensions. In a grade 6 class including English Language Learners (ELLs), students were conducting a critical thinking gallery walk, after reading articles on *Remembering Gandhi*. There were three different articles, leveled for each group. Students had a graphic organizer and a critical thinking wheel to scaffold thinking and were asked to identify questions they may have and explain the meaning of the chosen quote and how it connects to another historical figure. The push-in teacher was assisting the ELLs in completing the same assignment. However, in a grade 8 science class on genetic traits, learning opportunities were missed when students asked to go over vocabulary to be able to complete the task.
- Teachers referred to a Critical Thinking wheel to include more Webb's *Depth of Knowledge (DOK)* questioning in their lessons. In response to questioning, students cited textual evidence in a grade 7 English language Arts (ELA) class and justified their responses. There were peer interactions and students were challenged to justify their statements in relation to a non-fiction text on *Natural Disasters*. Students were highly engaged while discussing Hurricane Katrina with their peers.
- In most classes, connections to the real world by explicitly connecting to concepts of everyday experience to encourage inquiry were present. Teachers, for the most part, were often conferring with groups and taking notes. While many teachers encourage students to frame their own questions and respond to other students, there were instances of teachers serving as the leader and answering student questions instead of reframing and redirecting the questions to other students for discussion.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Higher-order thinking skills are embedded in curricula and academic tasks that are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Curricular development results in coherence across grades and subjects that promotes college and career readiness and access to rigorous and engaging curricula and tasks for all students to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Purposeful lesson planning incorporates instructional shifts and key standards to build coherence and promote college and career readiness across all subject areas. Planned strategies emphasize tiered-academic vocabulary, fluency, multi-step problem solving, argumentative writing and text-based responses. The *Code X* program is used in English Language Arts (ELA) with complementary texts from Achieve 3000. In addition, there are *Novel Units* with leveled texts and close reading plans. Continued participation in the Title IIB Math-Science Partnership at Hunter College focuses on research-based pedagogical approaches to provide students in various subgroups access to Common Core-aligned math curriculum coupled with the *EngageNY* modules to advance student achievement beyond procedural skill to conceptual understanding. Furthermore, science teachers participate in the Urban Advantage Middle School Science initiative to focus on bringing inquiry-based learning and the integration of literacy into the science classroom. English as New Language (ENL) teachers are using Pearson Longman Series designed to provide instruction that accommodates diverse language proficiency levels. Scholastic Scope magazines on different levels are used in social studies for high interest and deep thinking regarding pertinent social issues. In addition, the school has a teaching American History grant and students are asked to read and write like a historian.
- Lesson plans are designed to provide multiple points of entry so that all students have access cognitively engaging tasks through tiered assignment, leveled texts, graphic organizers, writing and discussion prompts, previewing academic language through vocabulary word maps based on the Frayer Model, and the use of close-reading techniques and multimedia resources such as videos. During a team meeting, teachers were designing lessons that were differentiated for various students including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.
- Instructional tasks that push students to be intellectually engaged and challenge them to be in charge of their own learning are designed with career and college readiness goals. Professional development emphasizing instructional practices such as student-led discussions and student-created questions using Webb's *DOK* or Bloom's Taxonomy, along with Socratic Circles, jigsaw activities, and inquiry-based assignments with student choice has been a priority to emphasize student rigorous habits and higher-order thinking.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments aligned with the school's curricula to track student progress. Classroom practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers and students are aware of next learning steps based on meaningful feedback. Effective curricular and instructional adjustments on demand and over time enable students to increase mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade-level, common assessments and rubrics across subject areas are promoted by teacher teams. There are formal assessments and teacher-created, project-based assessments such as for genre studies and Socratic Circles. Baseline, midyear, end-of-year and prior year assessments are used as well as the gathering of data on a weekly basis. Embedded into each unit of study are multiple opportunities for informal assessments such as exit slips, conferencing notes and peer-to-peer or self-assessments. This school-wide data collection and analysis provides teachers with an ongoing portrait of student mastery. In addition, there is a uniform school-wide grading policy.
- The school's data system compiles a variety of data and shows trends across classes and subjects. This data is used to plan instruction, analyze growth and make curriculum modifications and adjustments. For example, teachers analyzed *Code X* and concluded that students had difficulty in citing evidence and understanding the author's point of view. Therefore, the teacher team planned to revise mentor texts and reteach the topic of using evidence from the text to support the central idea/theme.
- Teachers submit Student Assessment Forms with data-driven action plans for students who need more support. This has helped identify academically at-risk students and the school has set up Core Support programs, including academic intervention services and tutoring services. Professional development has focused on continuous improvement and reflection of actionable feedback from teachers with the use of checklists, and task-specific rubrics. Ongoing checks for understanding are used strategically to drive instruction across the vast majority of classrooms. Teachers use checklists and conferencing notes to identify who needs immediate attention during a lesson. Several students stated the importance of writing and doing homework and receiving feedback from their teachers as well as their peers on how to improve. Teachers monitoring of student understanding during lessons is visibly active and continuous. The use of self-assessing rubrics and routines such as the red, yellow, green cup meter, and the "3 before me" protocol are reinforced with students to promote ongoing and regular self-checks for understanding. In response to these monitoring protocols there are instances when teachers pull small guided groups to further support student understanding and progress.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that support the goals of the school and strengthen teacher instructional capacity. Embedded distributed leadership structures that influence key decisions are in place.

Impact

All teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning and the work of teacher teams has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence, improved pedagogy, student work and progress.

Supporting Evidence

- All teacher teams meet regularly during designated time embedded into the weekly schedule. There are subject area teams as well as grade inquiry meetings. Though a majority of the teams are grade and subject specific, inquiry collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers offers a perspective on the specific needs of students with disabilities to support achievement. In both the core inquiry team and the grade 7 science meeting visited, there was a special education teacher in attendance. The principal has empowered teachers to grow into leadership roles and guide their own professional development. Teacher leaders act as coaches based on their content area expertise and share in researching, planning and designing unit plans and lessons aligned to the standards and differentiated to meet the individual needs of students.
- Teachers make key decisions on teaching practices, evident during the science team which focused on rigorous learning tasks and assessing student outcomes on recent tests using the same model that is used across grades. It was determined that students are stuck between choices when presented with multiple choice options. The team decided to focus attention on teaching students how to eliminate guesses and use reasoning to select the correct answers. Each meeting is facilitated by a different teacher who selects the agenda topic. In addition, intervisitations are planned and facilitated by teachers that extend the common understandings of teacher team work to elevate instructional practice.
- During the meeting with teachers, it was stated that teacher instructional capacity has strengthened through teams working on a toolbox of teaching strategies informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Additionally, the core inquiry team is a structure used to support distributive leadership. It is composed of representatives from each content area and engages in on-going assessment and reflection of school-wide work. Teachers on this teams act as liaisons between the content teams and school leaders to facilitate the inquiry process and assist teachers in identifying instructional gaps, share successful strategies and increase interdisciplinary planning to support student achievement. This collaboration works in conjunction with the Professional Learning Committee to design and implement professional development addressing teacher needs and concerns. There is also a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) team that plans, implements and supervises the initiative to support social and emotional learning. These structures have further empowered teachers in a school culture that allows teacher leaders to serve as peer instructional coaches, establish intervisitations and provide professional development to demonstrate best practices.