



# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**I.S. 237**

**Junior High-Intermediate-Middle School Q237**

**46-21 Colden Street  
Queens  
NY 11355**

**Principal: Judith Friedman**

**Date of review: December 22, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Joan Prince**

## The School Context

I.S. 237 is a middle school with 1247 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 73% Asian, 8% Black, 17% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 19% English Language Learners and 14% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.5%.

## School Quality Criteria

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

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

The school leader and faculty engage in a rigorous process of curriculum development aligned to the *Common Core Learning Standards* and the *Danielson Framework for Teaching*. Higher order thinking skills are consistently emphasized across grades and content areas for all learners, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and high achieving students.

### Impact

These curricula decisions result in building coherence and promoting college and career readiness for all learners. Student ownership of learning fosters high levels of student thinking and engagement across grades and subjects for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- School wide decisions to use rigorous reading, writing and math programs requiring students to construct responses and explain their thinking have been implemented. The school uses the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project curriculum and instructional strategies, providing coherency and structure across English Language Arts classrooms on all grades. Math teachers have developed instructional units aligned with the New York Scope and Sequence. Additionally, they have modified units to align with the *EngageNY* program modules.
- Content area documents highlight the strategic integration of the instructional shifts. Social Studies and science documents evidenced a focus on text and writing from primary sources. The school-wide instructional focus is on Written and Verbal Evidence (WAVE) aligning with college and career readiness skills and standards based elements of argument construction. It is designed for preparing students for rigorous written and verbal academic discourse expected in high school and college. Riding the WAVE has been added to include the use of discussion and academic language. In the classes visited, students were explaining and justifying their process and answers to their peers. Visuals on the smart board assisted the English language Learners (ELLs).
- Teachers use Achieve 3000 to support the reading and writing curriculum for ELLs. A Companion Book with modified rubrics is used to assist struggling students. All students participate in the arts. Talent classes are incorporated into the schedule as well. In each unit of study there are rigorous guiding questions and performance tasks informed by the *Danielson Framework for Teaching*. The Science curriculum includes hands-on experiments based on the scientific method embedded into all units. Special education teachers use the computer-based program IXL to support students. High achieving students in Grade 8 take regents courses in Algebra, United States History, Earth Science and the Living Environment. Decisions around curriculum and ongoing revision of unit plans indicate that individual students needs are being addressed. The use of rigorous content, critical thinking and problem solving activities assures that students are being prepared for their next level. Every class is given a 'Thinking Ahead: Your Future' career planning checklist where each student is asked to plan a successful path to their future career. This is continually updated and revised by the students.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points and challenging tasks for students. The extensions that foster deep reasoning in student work products vary across the grades.

### Impact

Across classrooms, curricula extensions support students to produce meaningful work products, which reflect high levels of student thinking, however, there are missed opportunities for all students to take ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms teachers provide small group instruction. Students participated in discussions by responding to teacher-generated questions but in-depth analysis was not clearly required of all students. Evidence of higher level thinking in purposeful class groupings and or pairs, to assist in creating meaningful work products was consistent in the classrooms visited. Students use research skills to produce text-based evidence as they argue and defend their positions during discussions. In a grade 8 social studies class using the Socratic seminar protocol students held each other accountable for participation. For example, in a lesson on the opening of Japan, students addressed whether America should trade with Japan. They were required to cite from a text that covered a specific period during the presidency of Millard Fillmore and Commodore Perry's work with Japan. Students were given a seminar data sheet to record whether they agreed or disagreed with a comment and if comments relating to the real world were stated.
- Questioning and discussion techniques have been the school's professional development focus. Teachers were asked to create at least one question that required students to use higher order thinking skills to promote discussion with each other as opposed to a repetition of facts. In a grade 6 English Language Arts class, the class was in table groups listening to the teacher. They referred to notes and some students shared out while assisting each other in their groups. Teaching strategies incorporate scaffolds and supports providing multiple entry points for all students into the lessons.
- Across all subject areas projects are incorporated into the curricula to increase student engagement and expose students to a wide variety of instructional tools and practices. Student work reflects a variety of skills and new ways of expression that serve to further student understanding and academic growth. For example, using the Particular, Inform, Entertain (PIE), rubric in English Language Arts for personal narratives allows students to address this form of writing in a new way. Teachers are focused on aligning advanced instructional strategies to complement the rigor of the curriculum. However, academic tasks vary in opportunities for student choice and extensions for higher performing students, limiting accelerated learning for all students.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The school's uniform assessment practices are strategically aligned to the curricula and the standards.

### Impact

These common assessments, rubrics and grading policies are used to make effective curricula adjustments and are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Actionable feedback is provided to all students, including English language Learners and students with disabilities, positively impacting student outcomes.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use school-wide checklists as guides when developing assessments. Common rubrics are part of the school-wide focus and are used to assess student work in all subjects. Teachers use data from the New York State standardized exams, uniform grade level pre-teaching assessments and classroom assignments in order to purposefully group students. Performance tasks contain rubrics and are embedded in teachers' practice. There is a school-wide grading policy, uniform midterm exams and finals in all core subject areas as well as in hygiene. Rubrics and feedback forms that highlight student strengths and areas for improvement are seen across a majority of classrooms. Teachers embed assessment into lessons, and include frequent checks for understanding to assure that all students are learning the content and concepts being taught.
- Instructional units are reviewed and revised utilizing data based on student performance and teachers' reflections regarding instructional approaches and demonstrated student learning. Actionable feedback to students is implemented through rubric forms from teachers and peer assessment. The implementation of uniform assessments and grading policies allows teachers and school leaders to monitor and assess student performance and make necessary adjustments to curricula and instruction. Using evidence from student performance the school leaders are afforded the opportunity to assess teacher effectiveness across common disciplines and grade levels. Each week teachers monitor progress through data analysis as well as formative and summative assessments to provide on-going and meaningful feedback to students. An initiative to encourage teachers to turn key conceptual understanding strategies to staff members has increased collaboration opportunities and allows teachers time to try out new strategies with informal feedback from peers.
- A school vision statement focuses on students developing the intellectual ability and skills needed to become critical thinkers who raise questions, assess relevant information and communicate effectively. For example, upon examining the Achieve 3000 data it was revealed that the English Language Learners showed an increased in their reading levels. Thus, teachers and school leaders agreed to continue these informal assessments.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The school promotes a culture of high expectations for staff, students and families through use of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The administration and staff create a clear path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability for these expectations. All constituents contribute to a culture of learning and support so that all students are on a clear path to college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has established partnerships with families to support and encourage students to become responsible citizens equipped to contribute to society in meaningful ways. This is shown through fully attended workshops, parents' active participation on the School Leadership Team and participation in college office presentations. There are excellent academic and personal support systems for students and parents. For example, additional classes within and beyond the school day support students academically. Parent specific workshops ensure that students complete their education and are ready to enter high school with significant understanding of what is expected in the future. At the well-attended parent meeting it was stated that the teachers guide the students with a high level of support, both academic and social-emotional that is also provided to families as well. As stated at the student meeting, they understand and appreciate their parents' roles in the school community and feel empowered by the school to make decisions about their future. They are aware of the high expectations from their teachers and all expect to graduate, go to high school and college. There is a clear line of reciprocal communication that provides parents with opportunities to focus on student learning. There are parent information boards, a school-wide newsletter, informative emails, a high school night, math teams and competitions, and a debate team. The connection with the New York City Greening program resulted in their providing solar panels to the school with hands-on parent participation.
- The principal has designed a structured observation and feedback system that directly informs professional development for teachers aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. There is a clear system of reciprocal feedback with teachers taking part in inter-visitations, modeling lessons and focusing on subgroups to move students toward the next level. Within the goal setting process, staff and students track progress to meet requirements that include self-assessments, rubrics aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and having students articulate how ready they are for college or careers.
- At multiple points during the year the principal and teacher teams monitor the progress the school is making regarding the building of a positive school culture and the school's improvement vision. Reports are developed to address both strengths and weaknesses. This work is embraced and reinforced by the staff, including special education and English as New Language teachers, leading to a culture of mutual accountability to increase student outcomes.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based structured professional collaborations. Leadership structures provide a means for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricula and practice.

### Impact

Informed by the implementation of the Common Core and the instructional shifts, the work of teacher teams and distributed leadership has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence improved pedagogy, and improved student learning outcomes.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet bi-monthly to look at student work. Utilizing data based on assessments they make curricular decisions and develop additional instructional strategies. They review student performance and work products to inform planning for future instruction and task development. Teachers agreed that the collective efforts of teams have a direct impact on their approaches to instruction. Teachers stated that they have the opportunity to discuss both skills and strategies to improve lesson planning, share best practices and identify and plan for strategic groupings in class assignments across content areas and grades. There is a professional learning calendar with teacher presenters and subgroup leaders to facilitate student progress and improve teaching and learning.
- Teachers are continuing to work to identify and plan for adjustments to the curriculum. The teachers shared that they are interested in expanding their work vertically to become more informed about student needs. Teachers share unit plans at department team meetings and give feedback to one another. Structured inter-visitations and professional development workshops led by teachers take place to support and improve teacher practice. The principal stated that the impact of teacher team efforts is evident in classroom observations where more collaborative learning and discussions take place. Shared leadership that focuses on improved student outcomes are seen in agendas resulting in school wide instructional coherence.
- Teams are systematically analyzing key elements of lesson planning, assessment data and student work. At the grade 8 inquiry team meeting academic language was being examined using the Written and Verbal Evidence (WAVE) reference sheet as the protocol. Teachers discussed that 'words of the week' was positively impacting learning and should be part of the everyday routine. They agreed, after a productive discussion, that 'testing' words and words with the same family of meaning, such as author's purpose and the main idea should also be incorporated.
- Teachers have frequent opportunities to observe each other. Teachers are encouraged to visit classes where exemplar differentiation and questioning techniques are practiced. Teachers who are experts provide workshops and model lessons supporting the belief in distributed leadership. The inquiry team discussed how the risk free environment has positively impacted their teacher practice.