



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

The Urban Institute of Mathematics

Middle School X371

**650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465**

Principal: Jennifer Joynt

**Date of review: December 8, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich**

The School Context

Urban Institute of Mathematics is a middle school with 290 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 4% Asian, 15% Black, 59% Hispanic, and 21% White students. The student body includes 4% English Language Learners and 21% students with disabilities. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 92.7%.

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	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Distributive leadership structures afford teachers and teacher teams the opportunity to make key decisions about teaching and learning through the systematic analysis and revision of curriculum and student work products.

Impact

The work, frequency, and variation of teacher teams provide all teachers with opportunities to engage in shared leadership and professional collaboration resulting in improved teacher capacity and mastery of student goals for groups of students across the school community.

Supporting Evidence

- When grade or subject teams meet, they determine next steps in teaching based on student data. This becomes a cycle of inquiry, whereby they use the item analysis of common assessments to make instructional changes and memorialize them in an action plan. Action plans become the notes for the team meeting, as it guides next steps to ensure that student achieve mastery. Teachers stated that this lesson study work has supported their personal practice and increased student mastery. One teacher stated he was able to provide students with roles to prevent students from hiding during group work, and it improved student discussion and engagement. A vast majority of teachers agreed that the lesson study is beneficial. They added that it led to providing students with a checklist in addition to the rubric to support their writing as well as expanding students' discussion explanations. This learning was shared by teachers and teacher leaders as they both agree that even when coaching another, they improve and reflect upon their own instructional practice.
- Teachers stated that they share best practices and support each other's growth. One teacher explained that, "Using questioning and discussion techniques, or 3b on Danielson, is an area of growth for me and the process of lesson study with my team is so helpful for me to grow." The teachers agreed with this statement, providing examples of other's suggestions such as providing bonus questions for all students as a challenge. Another teacher stated that he used an electronic exit ticket called 'plickers' that provides immediate data for the teacher regarding who understood and who needs additional support. The teacher used the immediate feedback to regroup students and determine the revised mini lesson, with data to demonstrate student growth in those skills. Another teacher stated, and others agreed, that these team meetings are invaluable to her professional growth.
- Distributive leadership is clearly embedded in the school. Instructional leaders facilitate each teacher team meeting and are part of the administrative cabinet. This leadership role includes collaboratively creating agendas, facilitating meetings as needed, and delegating next steps. Teachers who hold these leadership roles are Peer Collaborative Teachers and Model Teachers. Additionally, staff determine the professional development opportunities, and provide these sessions to each other. The staff determined at the end of last year, that the English Language Arts (ELA) textbook being used was not supporting students, so they collaboratively decided on implementing a new one, then created pacing, curriculum maps, tasks, and lessons accordingly.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teacher practice is aligned to the curriculum and the Danielson *Framework*, and demonstrates a school wide belief about how students learn best. Teaching strategies, across classes, consistently provide varied entry points into the curricula, and students' work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teacher pedagogy across the majority of classrooms is engaging and meets the needs of learners. However, there are pockets where teachers miss opportunities to provide students with strategic scaffolds or extensions thus limiting opportunities for all learners to engage in higher-order thinking tasks to accelerate and own their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The schoolwide belief that students learn best “by doing” is supported by the implementation of the workshop model of instruction. Students were involved in their learning by doing in varying degrees across subject areas. Students worked in labs in science, hands-on activities demonstrating ratios in math, and writing in ELA and social studies. Students had opportunities to pair-share and discuss their thoughts prior to whole class discussions so they could demonstrate their thought processes. Most students were engaged as they were the ones doing the work. However, extensions to ensure challenge for higher-level students were not evident in the vast majority of classes.
- Students have choice in many ways within most classes. In a living environment class, students had choice in the questions to answer, the methods to use, and the group roles to hold as they conducted the lab exercise on inferences made from the size of a bird's beak. In a grade 6 ELA class, students chose which nonfiction article to use to demonstrate their knowledge of theme or central idea as well as the focus standard it addresses. They also were given a choice as to whether or not to use the paragraph organizer or to write a paragraph without the organizer. Demonstrating coherence, a self-contained special education grade 6 ELA class was learning the same lesson, but with several additional scaffolds provided, including an opportunity for student groups to pair-share about two main concepts, biography and citizenship. However, discussion was teacher-directed with minimal student input and extended pacing that provided more time than students needed as evidenced by student disengagement.
- Student discussion is built into the lessons. The staff and administration stated this “will give students opportunities to make sense of their learning and put it in their own words.” Some discussions included a majority of students, yet some discussions ‘ping-ponged’ from one student to the teacher and back out to another student, instead of students responding directly to each other as the school wide goal states. Although the goal of the school is for students to respond to each other and to decrease the amount of teacher-talk so students own their learning, this is not as yet being demonstrated in the vast majority of classes.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school creates and adapts rich, cohesive curricula in all content areas that is consistently reflected upon and refined to address the needs of all learners and incorporates ever-increasing levels of rigor.

Impact

The school's commitment to analyzing student work and revising units of study to maximize coherency and to meet all student needs has resulted in a seamless educational experience for students that causes them to think deeply, make connections among and between subjects, prepare them for the next levels of their education, and promotes college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff analyzed data from the New York State assessment results in ELA and math, to determine the areas of need for their students. Three key anchor standards were identified: reading standard 2, determining the central idea; writing standard 1, writing arguments to support claims, and math standards practice 3, constructing viable arguments. To this end staff has strategically integrated these instructional shifts into the curriculum maps school wide. Since constructing arguments are woven throughout the subjects, including math and science, all students have access to these standards across grades because they are spiraled from grade to grade.
- Reflection is a school wide practice. At the end of last year, the staff conducted a school wide evaluation of the curricula and student data, determining a need to adopt new programs to better suit students' needs. They adopted *CMP3* for mathematics, *Core Reading*, and a supplemental reading program called *STARl*. Even with the challenge of employing new programs, staff has ensured that the anchor standards are interwoven and that students receive the supports needed to achieve mastery of these standards. The staff reflects after each lesson by completing a four-quadrant form that helps them to refine, revise, and readjust lessons, tailoring them to students' needs and to focus on student learning outcomes. From this thoughtful exercise, teachers determine additional supports, scaffolds, extensions, and groupings for students to cognitively engage in the curricula and meet the intended outcomes.
- Curricular planning documents are aligned across grades and subjects, using school wide formats. Curriculum maps include the key standard(s) as applicable, Common Core Learning Standards, unit title and duration, essential questions, and learning targets written as "I can" statements. Unit plans include essential questions, outcome goals that are leveled using the Depth of Knowledge (DOK), unit vocabulary, and formative and summative assessment evidence. Lesson plans indicate the grouping of students based on data and the reason for group placement. During teacher team meetings, teachers refine tasks and lessons to ensure that groups of students have access to curricula. For instance, after reflecting on a lesson, a history teacher determined a group of students needed additional support for writing the essay and added a checklist strategy, which resulted in improved student performance.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use common assessments that measure students' progress of acquired skills aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, rubrics, and a common grading policy aligned to the school's curricula.

Impact

The school analyzes assessment results to adjust instruction and curricula to meet student-learning needs. Common assessments provide a mutual lens and language to discuss student progress, give actionable feedback and inform instructional adjustments that result in advancing student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use a common grading system and rubrics to support student learning. Through actionable feedback, students are able to improve their work. Teachers believe students should be able to 'redo' their work for a higher grade and deeper understanding and this is enabled through the actionable feedback that is provided. Students stated, "If they are unhappy with their grade, as long as it is reasonable and not like a 95 but a 73 or something, you can redo it for a higher grade." Students all agreed that this is a common practice and that although each teacher might implement this practice using different routines, all are able to revise their work and resubmit for a higher grade using the teacher feedback along with verbal conferencing from the teacher. Many teachers use conferencing notes, and the format is individualized by teachers for teachers. For example, some of these conference notes contain details such as glows, new strategy used, a suggestion, and skills to work on or next steps. Teachers meet individually with students to share this in a conference setting. Feedback includes rubric scores, actionable next steps, and 'glows and grows'. The extent of the 'glows and grows' varies from class to class with some in-depth comments and some stated in bullet points.
- Teachers implement common assessments to determine student progress. At the beginning of the year, teachers implement the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment to set students' DRP goals. All students know their DRP score for reading and math as well as their goals. When asked why they were placed in this group for an assignment, students all answered, we are in this group because of our DRP scores and then pointed to where the groups are posted in the class. Teachers use the DRP scores for data-determined flexible grouping, creating tiered reading and math assignments, and developing supports for writing. A detailed analysis of the reading scores led staff and administration to develop a daily strategic reading period (SRP) where students are grouped by their DRP scores and provided targeted instruction using differentiated curricula, including *Achieve3000*, *LightSail*, and *STARl*, to further support student growth in reading. Teachers analyze data for each program by student and by skills addressed in the standards. To date, while most students are demonstrating growth, all students have not as yet demonstrated mastery.
- Teachers have a common assessment calendar. Teachers and administration use the results of common assessments and produce a one-page summary that is then used to determine additional supports for students such as New York State mandated support or after school and Saturday school.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. Expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness are communicated by staff and school leaders as they partner with parents.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability to support student progress toward high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents shared that they are able to contact teachers directly through EnGrade, an online grade program and have received direct responses that have supported their child in completing homework or projects, or were provided additional supportive assignments as well. Parents also stated that they partner with the staff as they work together to support the children's academic growth. For example, parents made appointments with teachers to learn how to support their child with the new concepts in math and as a result of their meetings were empowered to support their child at home. Students stated that they look at EnGrade with their parents to discuss their progress and assignments to be completed.
- Teachers stated that they consistently communicate to families regarding their children's progress toward these expectations. Communications include phone calls, emails, texts, backpacked letters, grade-team newsletters, and notifications through EnGrade. Teacher team members take turns contacting the families of the targeted group of students, either highlighting positive information or areas of concern. Teachers stated that they intentionally give both types of actionable feedback and different team members contact the families so they are able to support student learning at home across the curriculum. Teachers share a log to keep this information transparent within the team.
- Workshops have been provided for parents to help them understand the high school application process. Parents and students discussed attending college visits and high school tours and fairs and shared how helpful these were in their determining which high school to attend based on their career goals. These workshops supported the selection process and completion of the application.
- The administration provides consistent communications to all staff through a multitude of measures including bulletins, staff handbook, and professional development. School leaders support staff implementation of these expectations through a consistent cycle of observations and actionable feedback, which then informs the professional development plan. Teachers and teacher leaders create and present the professional development.