Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Academy for Environmental Leadership
High School 32K403
400 Irving Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11237

Principal: Chantandrea Blissett

Dates of Review:
March 7, 2017 - March 8, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Kevin Bradley
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Academy for Environmental Leadership serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Quality Ratings continued

#### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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</table>

#### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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Area of Celebration

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership and teachers play an integral role in key decisions.

Impact
Teacher instructional capacity has strengthened while implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts has been promoted. Teachers play an integral role in focusing on the instructional goals as well as building schoolwide coherence to support student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The science team looked through the January 2017 Regents results to inform future instruction to build schoolwide coherence. Teachers looked for trends across classes and identified the unit and the skills associated with the questions that were labeled as the most missed. The science team discussed possible reasons why students may have struggled with these questions. A pattern that teachers observed was that most of the questions missed required reading comprehension and were very reading heavy. The team identified that there was not another topic that students struggled with more than the questions requiring reading comprehension. As a result of this inquiry team meeting, the science department decided to focus on reading comprehension during instruction moving forward.

- The mathematics department team met to identify learning and instructional gaps for Algebra I students as evidenced by their January 2017 Regents results. The teachers used an item analysis protocol to create a multiple choice deconstruction chart. The item analysis protocol includes separating questions by percentage correct and standard addressed to look for patterns, filling in the multiple choice item deconstruction chart, identifying patterns, and making inferences that might explain why students had trouble with the selected questions. As a result of the item analysis, the math team identified that students did not know what “equivalent” means, or that “the same as” means equivalent. Next steps were identified as equivalence being a theme of the Algebra I course and math teachers making students more aware of equivalence in different ways it appears in Algebra I questions.

- Distributive leadership is embedded in the school’s Staff Development Committee consisting of lead teachers from each discipline. The Staff Development Committee created the school’s professional learning calendar for the year by surveying the staff and ensuring a focus on the Danielson components aligned to teacher need. Lead teachers also lead content-area inquiry team meetings and cohort grade-level team meetings to drive key decisions that affect student learning across the school. Teacher team meetings have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. Danielson ratings from September 2016 through November 2016 compared to December 2016 through February 2017 showed a ten percent increase in effective or highly effective ratings for select Danielson components. A teacher reported, “For the department, we have different levels of experience, and that has allowed us to help each other grow. We go over what has worked, what is my experience with a cohort level and individual students.” Increased student achievement is noted by a five percent improvement in the percentage of students receiving grades of over an 80 from January 2016 to January 2017. A comparison of average Regents scores from January 2016 to January 2017 showed increases across all exams.
Area of Focus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics aligned with the school’s curricula. School leaders and teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Teachers provide students with actionable feedback regarding student achievement, however practices were not evident across a vast majority of classrooms. Assessment data is used to adjust curricula and instruction, however there is not yet evidence that tracking progress is leading to increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, samples of student work products showed teacher-written actionable feedback directing students to the steps they should take to strengthen their work. A couple of examples of that feedback were “You include some great explanations for fixed vs. growth mindsets. Next time, be sure to connect your evidence to your explanation more thoroughly,” and “Your words match your theme and thematic statement. Next time, let’s focus on the structure of your phrases and continue to work with different analogies.” Actionable feedback appears on post-it notes and written on rubrics across the school in different grades and subjects. One student reported, “I was working on my ELA [English Language Arts] essay. I had to look through the text for evidence and my teacher’s feedback helped break it down to paragraphs.” While actionable feedback is apparent across classrooms, student work brought to the meeting with students did not contain actionable feedback on some of the work products illustrating that this practice was not yet in place across a vast majority of classrooms.

- Teachers use rubrics to rate personal essays, document-based question (DBQ) essays, independent reading, and students’ engagement and preparedness during classroom discussion. Teachers also use the different rubrics associated with New York State Regents exams to give feedback on text analysis and writing from sources. Teachers indicate glows and grows or areas of celebration and improvement on slips of paper attached to rubrics. Additionally, teachers use rubrics as checklists. One student reported, “When we do essays, and we’re working on we do, you do group tasks, we work with each other and check out rubrics for writing essays or paragraphs or whatever.” However, assessment practices do not yet offer a clear portrait of student mastery, as evidenced by assessment documents that lack standardization.

- Common assessments are used to determine student progress and considerations for schoolwide support. In literacy, teachers administer Gates-MacGinitie exams. Performance tasks are also administered to track student progress across content areas. The school’s grade-level and subject-area teams engage in inquiry work, using item analysis from Regents exams and the Gates-MacGinitie exam to inform teachers’ instructional plans, such as the science department focusing on reading comprehension questions as a result of recent Regents inquiry work. The staff follows the inquiry cycle in teams, engaging in multiple pieces of action research across grades. Teachers use an item analysis protocol to examine results, find common misconceptions and errors among different subpopulations, create an action plan to address these instructional gaps, and implement the action plan. As a result of the data analysis from common assessments, grade-level cohort teams have a targeted skill action plan that includes, for the ninth-grade cohort, reading text-dependent questions. The tenth-grade cohort targets command of evidence. The eleventh-grade cohort targets counterclaim and the twelfth-grade cohort targets organization and coherence. The action plan results in ongoing curricular modifications across content areas, however all students do not currently demonstrate increased mastery.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact
Curricula are coherent and promote college and career readiness. Students have access to rigorous curricula across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- Review of curricular documents revealed alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards, New York State content standards, and the New Generation Science Standards (NGSS) where applicable, as well as integration of the instructional shifts across grades and content areas. Curricular documents included evidence of consistent alignment with integration of the math instructional shifts. For example, in a ninth-grade lesson plan, students are asked to deepen their knowledge of factoring a trinomial by evaluating how quadratic functions differ from linear and exponential functions. Another document details information on how students can interpret y-axis, x-axis, and trend lines in a graph to determine what they see, what connections can be made, and what conclusions can be made from analyzing graphs to apply to real world situations. Curricular documents included assignments evidencing integration of the English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shifts. For example, a twelfth-grade lesson plan on determining the value of recycling includes students engaged in citing evidence from an article to present both sides of an argument. In a tenth-grade lesson plan on writing a multi-paragraph document-based question essay on the positive and negative effects on the areas colonized by British Imperialism, students are asked to cite textual evidence from multiple documents throughout the process.

- Unit plans consistently challenge students to utilize rigorous habits. Learning goals in unit plans include, “Students will be able to make distinctions on ethical positions and write a paragraph analyzing rights and freedoms” and “Students will be able to discuss and analyze the causes and effects of British Imperialism through a multi-paragraph DBQ essay.” Additionally, students are to consistently write. For example, in a tenth-grade lesson plan students are asked to read the selected articles using the reading protocol to engage with the text and then to summarize each article in at least five sentences. Lesson plans consistently detailed high-level questions. Examples of higher-order questions found in curricular documents are, “Is human cloning ethical and should it be practiced?”, “If you were an Obstetrician, would you advise your pregnant patients to have a prenatal test?”, “What rights and freedoms of the individual are necessary for a healthy human society, and which should be given up for the good of the people?”, and “What is the common theme of these ideas?”

- Samples of curricular documents showed an emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills across the grades and subjects, while also ensuring access by English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. For example, an Earth science lesson plan includes translated documents on physical and mechanical weathering for use with ELLs and a seating chart indicating students grouped by mixed ability, with a focus on ELLs and repeaters who receive additional supports from the teacher. The leadership development lesson on social action, includes the articles available to students in several Lexile levels, a graphic organizer, and Spanish-English dictionaries.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs that students learn best when they are tasked with making their thinking visible. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Teaching practices foster higher-order thinking and ensure that all students have access to the curricula. All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching practices are student-centered provide multiple opportunities for students to work with their peers. In an English class during a lesson about Animal Farm by George Orwell, students were working together in groups, writing paragraphs based on one of the statements that they selected from the idea guide. Students shared out their choice, and their reasoning about why they chose that particular piece. In a geometry lesson, students worked in groups with a proofs with circles worksheet and activities that invited student discussion. In an Earth science class, a lesson on weathering had students asking questions of one another and making their thinking visible.

- Across classrooms, teaching practices reflected the belief that students learn best when instruction is rigorous and student-centered. During an Advanced Placement (AP) art studio class, students participated in a group looking at two peers’ art pieces in connection to the International Day of the Woman. The teacher modeled expectations and the students engaged in feedback to peer artists and offered their interpretations. In a global studies class, students worked on a DBQ essay about the causes of British imperialism, and the positive and negative effects on the areas colonized by the British. A student was able to articulate their learning, “A DBQ essay is taking knowledge & evidence from different documents.” In a living environment class, students used discussion stems, graphic organizers, and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge levels to organize their understanding. The student-to-student discussion was student-centered and Regents-aligned.

- Multiple entry points allowed all learners access to the material. In an Algebra I class, student conversations and students demoing their answers were evident with visible differentiation for students based on their understanding. Some students were supported through paraprofessionals helping with English. In a living environment class, students were working in pairs using three articles they were reading. Two of three articles were translated versions, and a paraprofessional in Arabic was checking in with English Language Learners (ELLs) and modeled how to write responses to the text-based questions. Additionally, in a leadership development class, students had different Lexile levels for texts that they were annotating and highlighting as they prepared for a flash debate.
### Additional Finding

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and students and offer support through clear, focused, and effective feedback. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning.

#### Impact

Communication and professional development around high expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability. Students are prepared for the next level and own their educational experience.

#### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently conduct classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the standard for professionalism and high expectations for instruction. School leadership sends out a daily *Morning Memo* that includes expectations for the day and upcoming events. School leaders and teachers are mutually accountable to each other as teachers have the opportunity to rate school leaders and give feedback on their effectiveness of supporting teacher growth. This data is used by school leadership to refine supports for teachers. Content-area and grade-level teacher leads create mutual accountability among teams by leading meetings with specific outcomes tied to all participants having responsibility for shared goals of increased student achievement to be implemented across classes.

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and learning through regular professional development (PD) trainings around best practices aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This takes place through PD offerings detailing monthly topics covered around high expectations. Professional growth is ensured through participation in various PD sessions during the year, including a professional book club on *Mindset* by Carol Dweck, workshops on the Hochman Writing Method and using student data from Gates-MacGinitie assessments, as well as specific training sessions on the Danielson components, student engagement and questioning strategies. PD sessions include surveys assessing the experience to give feedback that school leaders use to guide decisions for future PD sessions.

- All students, including students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and ELLs, benefit from frequent feedback and guidance in which students receive individualized supports. One student stated, “We get feedback very often, teachers conference with us, mostly about what do you need to improve our grades. We log in to Pupil Path to know where we stand in certain classes. I check mine to see how I’m doing.” Another student spoke about college readiness offered through their AVID class saying, “The AVID program in our school teaches us how to use Cornell Notes, edit or highlight, write a learning log, and do binder checks to stay organized.” The school offers College Now opportunities for students to take college classes at New York City Technical College or City Tech from their junior year. A College Now student shared, “I get a chance to learn about how it is in college, they don’t treat you differently they give you the same amount of time, they never discourage you from what you want to do.” Students also spoke of afterschool and lunchtime tutoring that is offered at their school sharing, “Our teachers give you extra work to do your best. Are you keeping up? If you know the stakes, you stay after school or during lunch.” The guidance counselor provides important information to the students, as a student noted, “Every student has someone that they can go to, such as the counselor. She’s perfect with advice.” The school’s partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs), Summer Search and LEAF, provides additional opportunities to participate in college courses during the summer. Another partnership with Global Potential serves to fill a similar need with ELLs to give them ownership of their educational experience.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings

School leaders support teacher development with frequent classroom observation cycles. Prompt written feedback captures teachers’ strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Formal and informal classroom visits grounded in the observation and analysis of student work result in written feedback for teachers that makes clear the expectations for teacher practice and the supports available to help teachers meet them.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Each rated item is supported with specific detailed evidence from the observed class to support the rating. Next steps for teaching improvements are included throughout the class-specific evidence directed to specific categories of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and at the close of each observation report. In addition, school leaders discussed a strategy of observation cycle planning that targets teachers based on individual need as well as student need. A teacher reported, “I received feedback on different points in my lesson design, such as differentiation and extension activities. I have to be on point, with some of the structure of my class, using the 5-30-10 model.”

- Observation reports contain feedback that captures teachers’ strengths and weaknesses and is accompanied by next steps teachers should take in order to improve their practice and impact student success. For example, in one report feedback states “Provide every opportunity for students to justify their responses by asking them to explain ‘why’ and/or have them ‘explain their thinking and/or reasoning’ in their written/verbal responses.” In another report, “Differentiate the task...a majority of students in the class could handle a more challenging task. You may consider adding additional questions for these students, or giving an alternate task to some students that is more rigorous than what your students completed.” Another report included, “Be mindful to assign no more than 3-5 students to a group. This way you can do a better job of ensuring that all students have a clearly defined responsibility that spans throughout the process.” In addition, feedback also included, “Create opportunities in your lessons for structured conversations. Consider providing tools such as sentence starters, accountable talk stems and opportunities for students to prepare before speaking to one another.”

- In addition to the reports resulting from official classroom observations, school leaders meet with teachers for end-of-marking-period check-ins. The check-ins include a review of scholarship data, reflection on intervention measures taken with students, teacher feedback, and how the school leadership can best support the teacher. For example, a rubric is included for the check-in that includes the topics of grading policy and classroom expectations, documentation of outreach, and remediation attempts as aligned to a 4-Highly Effective, 3-Effective, 2-Developing, and 1-Ineffective rating scale that also mirrors the Danielson rubric rating scale. In addition, there is a general observations section, an employed strategies section, and a next steps section which includes feedback such as “Ensuring that students can articulate grading policy and expectations.” In a plan for success section, feedback includes, “Consider making positive phone calls home to parents.”