Quality Review Report

2016-2017

M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 03M256
154 West 93rd St.
Manhattan
NY 10025

Principal: Brian Zager

Dates of Review:
January 12, 2017 - January 13, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Clarence Williams Jr.
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

M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<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>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Quality Ratings continued

#### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</table>

#### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</table>

**Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
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**Area**

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Area**

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<th>Additional Finding</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
The school community promotes a culture of safety and social emotional support. Students are known by staff members on an individual basis.

Impact
The school community reflects a respectful environment where student voices are welcomed through various means including incentives. Attendance and social emotional learning are supported.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses “Panther Cards” to support and promote positive student behavior throughout the building. Each student is given three cards per week to give to students who demonstrate random acts of kindness. One card presented to a student stated the reason they were receiving the card was for the following, “Reaching out to a student who felt left out by asking if they were ok.” An additional example was, “Showing courage and self-confidence while pronouncing a difficult word in front of the class.” A student stated that receiving these cards was one of their favorite things about the school. Students also receive rewards such as pizza parties for accumulating the most cards per class.

- The principal stated that the school has a full time restorative justice coordinator (RJC). During an interview, the restorative justice coach stated that the purpose is to deescalate conflicts among students and communicate with parents on a regular basis. The RJC is trained in Life Space Crisis Intervention, a program designed to teach staff members how to recognize, negotiate, and deescalate conflict and address behavior management situations when they arise. The principal has stated that most staff members have been awarded certificates of completion in the program. Students have stated that the restorative justice program helps keep them safe. A school survey stated that most students agree that the school is safe.

- Structures are in place so that staff members know each student individually. The principal meets with each grade level on a monthly basis. During an interview students stated that the principal knows everyone’s name. The school also uses advisory to support social growth of students in a smaller structured setting.

- The school utilizes student of the month acknowledgments for two students per month. This certificate is given to students for positive behavior in class. Students also earn points by displaying good citizenship. For example one student bought in the most cans for a can drive that the school participated in. This student earned a uniform ticket, which is a free dress down day. The student stated, “I was a student of the month and I received my uniform ticket, now every month I try again.”

- The school uses town hall meetings to hear student voices. These meetings are held three times per semester to address social concerns and preparation for the next level. Students have stated that the principal uses this platform to hear student concerns. An example was provided when students requested an honor roll program in the hallway; honor student names are now posted in the hallway.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

The use of rubrics is demonstrated in teacher practices, however not in the vast majority of classes’ visited. Teachers check for understanding and students have opportunities to self-reflect.

Impact

Meaningful feedback that supports student learning was evident in classrooms, however in some classes students did not demonstrate knowledge of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Across most classrooms, teachers use rubrics to support student comprehension. Teachers and students use a R.A.C.E.R. rubric to assess student understanding across most classes. (Restate, Answer, Cite examples, Explain and Reread.) A teacher presented a sample from a student on Newton’s Laws of Motion. A four point rubric was attached whereas the student received a four in the following, “writing prompts were clearly restated, the writing prompt is answered correctly, there is a clear and complete explanation connecting the examples to the answers and the requested number of examples are provided that fully support the answer.” Under the teacher comments, the teacher stated that the student did a good job explaining the quotations and effectively used the vocabulary. The teacher stated that future lessons will include more time and peer assessments to ensure that students will have additional time to proof read their work.

- In some classes observed, teachers used exit tickets to assess student comprehension. A grade seven math class showed an exit ticket that required the student to explain in their own words why it is important to know the standard, “apply properties of operations as strategies to multiply and divide rationale numbers.” The student stated, “It’s a goal I can reach. It’s what you need for your seventh grade year. It means that we use the communicative properties of multiplication.” The exit slip is connected to a three-point rubric. One means that the student did not understand the concept; two means that there was some understanding and three meant that there was complete understanding. The student stated that they had complete understanding of the standard by using one of the properties of operations and simplified an improper fraction.

- Teachers use student-led conference scripts to allow students to self-assess their academic performance and to present to parents at parent/teachers conferences. The format demonstrates the class, the overall grade, the student’s strength, and the areas for improvement. One student stated that their overall grade in English Language Arts was a seventy-six and the strength was that they did all their homework but could improve on participating more. In social studies the student’s overall grade was eighty-two and the strength was that they complete all assignments on time, an area for improvement was “too much talking” in class.
### Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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#### Findings

The curriculum reflects Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Higher order thinking and rigor is reflected in most instructional documents.

#### Impact

The curriculum supports college and career readiness. All students including students with disabilities and English as a New Language students are exposed to rigorous instruction.

#### Supporting Evidence

- A grade seven social studies unit on the goals of the American Revolution demonstrated higher order thinking skills, differentiation strategies and instructional shifts. The unit shows that students will be required to use Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* tasks. Examples included “annotate text, determine author point of view and cite evidence, close reading and paraphrasing the text.” Differentiation strategies included the use of graphic organizers, metacognitive note-taking and all instructional materials are translated to Spanish. This was impactful because class work was translated for students in most classes visited.

- A grade eight unit plan on how readers connect to a text, and used Common Core Learning Standards on reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language. Under the topic “Key Lessons deconstructed form CCSS”, the unit states, “students will define values through collaborative discussion, students will collect and display ideas for classroom values by participating in cooperative learning groups and whole class share, students will independently reflect on one of the values by composing an essay.” The unit also requires students to use schema to identify the context of a text. Students with disabilities will also use a graphic organizer and complete an activity form a choice grid.

- Instructional shifts are used in the curricula. In a grade six science unit on what does it mean to be a scientist, students were required to cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical text, and determining the central ideas and conclusion of a text. This reflects the instructional shifts four and five, writing emphasizes use of evidence from sources to inform or make an argument, and build the transferable vocabulary they need to access grade level text. Instructional shift six, dual intensity states, “Students are practicing and understanding. There is more than a balance between these two things in the classroom.” This was also evident in the unit. It demonstrates that students will be required to learn the meaning of symbols and key terms while following multi-step procedures when they are working on experiments. The unit supports higher level thinking to reflect college readiness.
Findings
In classrooms, teaching practices reflect an expressed belief on how students learn best in conjunction with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. In most classes, students are engaged in discussions.

Impact
All students are working on challenging tasks that reflect rigorous student work products and higher-order thinking skills. Classroom work reflects student cognitive ability and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- A grade six science class visited demonstrated how density and temperature affects how water and air circulate. While observing a scientific experiment the teacher put red food coloring into one side of the container of water and blue food coloring into the other and heats up the red side with a hot plate. The teacher asked a student, “What is happening in the control container?” The student replied, “The red and blue stayed separate but then they started mixing”. The teacher asked the other students to explain their answer. Another student replied, “When the water is heated the molecules spread apart.” The teacher used a level four Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* prompt requiring students to design an illustration of the diagram that speaks to the effects of hot and cold air circulation.

- A grade six English Language Arts class visited, reflected students learning best by being engaged. A student with a disability was observed using a SID (Surprised, Inquiry and Discovery) graphic organizer while reading an article titled, “Plastics form as far away as Japan washing up on Washington beaches.” The student used a graphic organizer that listed a surprise (what they never knew), and inquiry (I wonder if) and a discovery, (a new surprise). Under surprise, the student wrote, “His team hauled twenty thousand pounds of debris.” under inquiry the student stated, “I wonder how long it took to travel that far” and the discovery stated, “I never knew debris could travel so far.” The student annotated the text to highlight the sections that supported his claims. All students were engaged in the lesson. This was demonstrated by participation and answering questions. In an additional example observed, a student listed, “Surprise – I never knew turtles eat plastic waste, Inquiry – I wonder if the amount of dying sea turtles are decreasing today, Discovery – The reason why turtles are dying.”

- A grade six math class demonstrated student participation and scaffolds for English Language Learners. Students were working on integers and absolute value in real world situations. Students were observed working in small groups and assessing each other’s work by looking at a student created number line that they demonstrated. One student stated, “That’s not correct because that number is not close to zero so the order is wrong,” The teacher asked the student, “How should you put the integers in order?” The student stated, “The number closest to zero is always greater.”
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: Proficient |

Findings

The principal communicates high expectations to the staff related to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teacher teamwork reflects high expectations to support learning.

Impact

The principal holds staff members accountable for expectations by conducting observations and providing training to support them. Teacher teams support student learning by offering continuous feedback.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal uses Advance to track teacher performance. A previous observation demonstrated high expectations in teacher performance. Under 1e, designing coherent instruction, the principal stated, “Have students talk and struggle together to pull their shared information and to allow for high level discussions among themselves.” A second example was provided from an additional informal observation; the principal stated, “You started working on the exit ticket at 12:05pm a full ten minutes before the end of the period. Try to spend five minutes for an exit ticket.” This was impactful, as teachers have stated that there has been a focus this year to drive coherent instruction.

- Teacher teams support learning by holding professional development to support the leadership’s high expectations for instructional accountability. Training includes topics such as the Wilson Reading System and the phonics-based program entitled Just Words to target English Language Learners. A Universal Design for Learning workshop was held to ensure that teachers were equipped on how to incorporate multiple entry points into the curricula. This professional development was turn keyed to the science team to support learning across the school. These professional developments were impactful because teachers were observed using the Universal Design for Learning in classrooms visited.

- The principal stated that high expectations are communicated through memorandums to staff. The principal provided a professional learning memorandum to all staff discussing the expectations for professional learning. Highlights of the memorandum included, “…creating assessments, creating student analysis, studying data and collaborative planning.” The principal stated that all of the aforementioned would be discussed to support the expectation of improving student outcomes.

- Teachers provide support for students. Students have advisory where counselors provide students with information regarding academic progress including progress reports, report cards and assessments. During an interview, a student stated that his counselor told him what he needed to do in order to go to the high school of his choice. “She told me I needed to improve my math scores so she arranged for me to go to after school.”
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings

Most teachers participate in inquiry-based meetings. Teacher teams analyze student data by grade level and or department.

Impact

Inquiry-based collaborations support schoolwide goals that improve teacher pedagogy. Teacher team collaborations typically result in student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades, math teams were observed using the Atlas protocol to look at student work. The protocol requires teacher to first look at student artifacts. During the meeting, teachers looked at student writing in math. A grade seven teacher presented work from her class on properties of operation. The work demonstrated that students could verbalize their answers, however they had challenges writing them down. Another teacher noticed that the English Language Learners had difficulty writing short answers. An example was presented from one teacher. The student received a one on the rubric for understanding the material on a unit exam in Spanish. A teacher suggested using the BUCK method (box the question, underline the facts, check the vocabulary and key words and knock out the unnecessary information) for the student. The team stated that the student received a two on the follow up test in English. This was impactful as the BUCK method was observed in several math classes visited. Follow-ups for teachers included having students peer assess and use a graded rubric. This was evident as the principal provided a list of goals that included improving teacher pedagogy in English.

- A special education department meeting was conducted on December 16, 2016. The minutes of the meeting included current student academic observations. An example was given that stated that one student wanted non-verbal cues from teachers so he will not be called out and also benefits from positive reinforcement. Teachers discussed reviewing his BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan) and his FBA (Functional Behavioral Assessment). Other students individual needs were discussed such as one student was failing math but assessments showed that they were on grade level. Another student discussed in the minutes struggles with being motivated to work. In this example the team decided to collect more data in order to update the FBA.

- A grade seven team used a Slice protocol. This protocol allows teachers to look at different students across grades to gather information based on guided questions. Under teacher observations, the protocol showed that a student was slow to get to their work, had trouble understanding and following directions in English or French and can be oppositional with teachers. A student in comparison demonstrated the following, “…benefits from strategic seating, does well with step by step directions, and does better when questions are read verbally.” The protocol has guided questions for both students; examples were, “What are the students strengths? What key skills does the student lack?” The big picture for the students was, “the student performs consistently across the subjects, and the student does well when scaffolds are built into the lesson.” Next steps for both students included arranged seating, breaking down reading questions, and having the student verbalize directions before engaging in written work.