Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Hamilton Heights School
Elementary 06M368
1750 Amsterdam Ave.
Manhattan
NY 10031

Principal: Michelle Herbowy

Dates of Review:
October 18, 2016 - October 19, 2016

Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart
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

Hamilton Heights School serves students in grade K through grade 5. 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</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>Developing</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

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

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

### Systems for Improvement

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

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

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
School leaders facilitate professional development and have strategic conversations with staff members based on observations. Feedback to teachers resulting from observations captures strengths and next steps.

Impact
Clear expectations for improved practice support the development of teachers through professional growth and reflection.

Supporting Evidence
- The principal articulates expectations to teachers related to improving teaching practices. A recent weekly message from the principal reminded teachers that observation cycles would begin that week and that it is a goal of each observation to be a “valuable opportunity to hone your practice and find solutions to any challenges you have.”

- Teachers receive effective feedback that identifies next steps to improve instructional practices. An observation report counseled one teacher to have students refer to the text by page in order to support their thinking with specific quotes. The feedback also suggested that the teacher could model this strategy as students learn this skill. The school leader went on to connect this to the instructional shift dealing with text-based answers. Teachers stated that in addition to providing suggestions for next steps, school leaders provide resources, from research on pedagogical strategies to classroom supplies, to support the professional development of the staff.

- The principal has strategic conversations with teachers to identify strengths and areas for improvement including decisions about tenure for probationary teachers. She designs professional development so that newly hired teachers become familiar with the progressive philosophy of the school. The school leaders have formed a partnership with another school with a similar instructional philosophy. Teachers from this school conduct intervisitations with the partner school.

- The professional development plan outlines topics for weekly sessions from September to January 2017. School leadership will adjust the remainder of the sessions for the school year to account for input regarding teacher performance and preference. Topics in October included how to adjust curriculum to meet the needs of students and literacy strategies for English Language Learners (ELLs).
Findings

Some observed classroom instruction reflects the foundational belief that students learn best when challenged through active exploration of content, but it is not yet evident in the majority of pedagogical practices. Teaching strategies do not consistently provide entry points and scaffolds for all students.

Impact

There is uneven engagement in higher-order tasks across classes and not all student work products demonstrate rigorous thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers, school leaders, and parents express the belief that framed the founding of the school, which is that children’s unique interests and goals remain at the heart of the curriculum. Instruction should challenge students through active exploration of content, while they learn to be critical and creative thinkers, readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and artists. This belief is reflected in some classroom instruction, but not all. For example, in the majority of classes observed, the discussions were teacher centered and consisted of questions and answers that alternated from teacher to student. Students did not regularly engage in rigorous discussions of high-level topics.

- In one class, students sat on the rug practicing techniques to increase mindfulness and readiness for learning in an activity conducted by the guidance counselor. In another class, students practiced good listening techniques by paying attention and also by making and keeping eye contact with partners. The instruction in these classes focused on the social and emotional preparation for learning. During a literacy lesson, students engaged in a lively discussion with each other about whether the character in a story should stand up for what he believes is right even if it is risky and dangerous. However, this high level of discussion was not apparent in most classes.

- There were missed opportunities in many lessons for students to turn and talk to a partner. In other classes, misunderstandings shared among multiple students were not challenged or corrected through discussion. For example, in a math lesson, a student determined that “23 – 7 =18” and other students at the table agreed without using the problem-solving strategy of checking the answer.

- In one class, ELLs were working in a small group with a teacher on decoding skills. One student asked how to spell the word, busy. She and the teacher discussed that this word did not follow the general rules for English pronunciation and spelling and the student subsequently determined the correct spelling. However, the teacher primarily conducted whole class instruction, with little or no differentiation in the planning or the implementation of the lesson. As a result, instruction did not consistently address the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Developing |

Findings

Teachers and school leaders are beginning to design curricula that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Tasks do not always emphasize rigorous academic habits for all sub-groups of students.

Impact

Although some lessons offer differentiated tasks to meet specific needs, curricula are not consistently accessible to a variety of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and school leaders collaborated to create the instructional vision for the school. Teachers expressed their own beliefs about how students learn best to inform their design. One teacher wrote, “I believe students learn best when they are collaborating, discussing, and creating together.” Another teacher wrote, “I believe that students learn best when they are actively doing something.” Some teachers plan lessons that reflect these beliefs, while other lesson plans are teacher centered and designed for whole class instruction.

- Vertical teacher teams review curriculum maps using a protocol that requires teachers to identify the questions and areas in need of discussion in their horizontal teams. The teams use a rubric to evaluate the components of the curriculum maps. The rubric rates qualities such as conceptual understanding and alignment to standards on a scale of 1 to 4. School leaders emphasized the importance of revising curriculum maps in literacy and math at a staff meeting early in the school year and provided time at that meeting for teachers to engage in such revisions.

- School leaders monitor the alignment of lesson plans to the Common Core Learning Standards by observing the implementation of those plans in the classroom. Instruction in theater, music, and dance align with the Blueprint for the Arts. However, few lesson plans explicitly reference the standards or the instructional shifts. Many lesson plans are organized by time frame and some, particularly the writing lessons, are from curricular materials that do not meet the particular needs of ELLs and students with disabilities. A second grade unit of study outlines the lessons to introduce students to the reading workshop model that emphasize the skills needed to become independent readers.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings
Some teachers and students use common rubrics and checklists that are aligned to the curriculum across grades. Checks for understanding and student self-assessment are beginning to be used.

Impact
Targeted feedback to help students improve their work is limited and only some adjustments to the curriculum meet the needs of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Students use checklists and rubrics specific to each grade level to guide them as they complete tasks. For example, a first grade checklist reminds students to use the word wall to help them spell words correctly. Another checklist outlined revision strategies for text-based writing, such as “Reread and add what a person, place, or a thing looks like.”

- Not all student work includes feedback to guide improvement. When feedback is provided, some teachers provide it through rubrics; others provide it by using check marks or encouraging words. The principal noted that student work products on display in classrooms frequently have no feedback attached.

- Teachers use the end-of-unit assessments in their adopted writing curricula, such as Writing Pathways and EngageNY. Teachers explained that they modify end-of-unit assessments to match the instruction they design on each grade. General education teachers collaborate with special education teachers in order to conduct running records for all students, including students with disabilities. They share information about students they have in common using an online document program. One teacher tiered students based on an assessment task and grouped them for a lesson. After conducting an in-class assessment during that lesson, she moved two students to a group with more support.

- Students know their reading levels and choose books from classroom libraries to match their levels and to challenge themselves to achieve their reading improvement goals. One grade five student stated that he chose to read the book, I Funny, a Middle School Story, by James Patterson, because he liked another book by the same author and it was on his reading level.
Findings

School leaders send weekly messages to ensure that staff understands what is expected and communicates with parents about student progress.

Impact

Teachers are held accountable and are provided with support to achieve expectations set by school leaders. Parents work closely with teachers to understand progress students make toward college and career readiness in middle school.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates high expectations to teachers in weekly messages. The first communication prior to the start of the school year included a reminder that reviewing curriculum was a priority along with individual and collective goal setting. School leaders use the observation cycle to hold teachers accountable and to provide support to teachers in reaching those expectations.

- The staff handbook outlines the expectations for teachers and staff, which include the adopted school vision that students will be involved in purposeful investigation, critical thinking, and problem solving. The handbook also outlines the expectations regarding on-going communication with parents and the importance that parents need to know “how best to support student effort.” Parents agreed that there is strong, consistent communication between parents and teachers about classroom practices and student progress, and that they receive support throughout the middle school application process.

- Parents indicate that they discuss school goals for the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) at the School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings and that the SLT members inform the parents about these goals. One parent stated that it is essential that there be strong communication between the principal, teachers, and parents. Parents stated that the principal is available to meet with them and has now established time for parents to meet regularly by hosting coffee hours with the principal, although some parents indicated they would like more information about changes in teacher staffing. Teachers and parents engage in open communication to learn strategies for managing challenging behaviors at home and at school.
Findings
Teachers engage in professional collaborations, some of them informal, and they are beginning to implement the Common Core standards. During these collaborations, teachers analyze the progress of targeted students.

Impact
Collaborations are beginning to result in improved teacher practice and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers have time built into their programs to meet for common planning. They do not have regularly programmed times for work on inquiry teams, although they often meet informally before and after the school day and during lunch times. One teacher explained that they discuss changes to lesson plans during these informal meetings.

- Teachers collaborate in a cycle of monitoring and revising curriculum maps during professional development sessions on Mondays. The cycle begins with a vertical review of the maps across grades, followed by a horizontal review within each grade, and culminates in teachers conducting a self-reflection on the implementation of the units of study. Units of study are aligned to the standards; however, not all lesson plans are as closely aligned. Sessions led by school leaders as well as teachers are held every five to six week cycle to revise the professional development plan.

- In a teacher team meeting, teachers were observed discussing the progress that targeted students were making as evidenced by student work products, some of which included student checklists, but did not include teacher feedback. They discussed possible strategies they could use for each child, such as increasing the fluency of sight words, having students act out the meaning of words, and using more labeling in the classroom. They looked at reading levels for their targeted children, which showed that, from June to October, 10 out of 16 students were reading at the same level, four had improved one level and two had improved by two levels. It was noted and celebrated that one ELL student was quickly gaining confidence using sight words. The team did not extend this analysis to look at trends across the entire grade.

- Teachers developed a referral form to help them identify challenging behavior patterns and address them immediately. The referral form requires teachers to provide five low-level interventions before making a more formal referral and to take more responsibility for resolving issues on their own. Teachers noted that using this form has helped them to develop a common language to use when providing factual, anecdotal evidence about student behaviors.