Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Unity Center for Urban Technologies
High School 02M500
111 East 33rd St.
Manhattan
NY 10016

Principal: Fausto De La Rosa

Dates of Review:
December 20, 2016 - December 21, 2016

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


School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

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

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

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Across the school, grade teams meet during period seven every day to analyze assessment data and student work products, as well as to share teaching strategies.

Impact

As a result of collaboration that strengthens teacher capacity, there is schoolwide instructional coherence that positively impacts student achievement. Systematic analysis of student data and work products has resulted in mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has structured their master schedule to allow for all teachers to meet during period seven each day of the week. Mondays and Wednesdays are designed for common planning focused on curriculum, with emphasis on Common Core Learning Standards, instructional shifts, and assessments. This includes time for Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) planning for co-teachers to review and plan weekly lessons. Tuesdays are structured for teacher teams to do inquiry work looking at student work and data during identified cycles. Thursdays are set aside for parent outreach and engagement. Fridays during period seven, special education teams meet to ensure that the learning needs of students with IEPs and other at-risk students are met and being followed. Teachers reported strengthening their instructional capacity through the work with teacher teams. One teacher stated, “As a result of the work within our teams, I try to find the learning style of each student. I don't do as much modeling as in the past, I'm not just modeling what’s available, I make sure that my modeling is a guide and I encourage students to show each other.”

- During an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher team meeting, the inquiry team maintained an instructional focus of increasing student engagement through content-specific writing by looking at examples of student work focusing on citing and analyzing evidence. The inquiry team also identified trends in common learning needs, and student work samples were analyzed to assess organization and coherence aligned to schoolwide use of the New York State Regents rubric. Inquiry teams follow protocols and provide feedback to colleagues accordingly. Written assessments across content areas serve as data for the inquiry cycle, specifically in supporting arguments through textual evidence.

- The school’s focus on increasing student engagement through content-specific writing has shown results. A student reported an example of the school’s focus on content-specific writing, and identified a challenging task which was, “An essay on European colonialization and different caste systems, synthesizing what happened in the past and connecting them to modern society today, with a thesis, followed by body paragraph, using evidence and leaving you with a rebuttal paragraph, last thing's to have a conclusion.” While emphasizing higher-level literacy skills across content areas, the school has shown a seven percent increase in four-year graduation rate in 2016 as compared to 2015, moving up to 86 percent. This increase was also reflected in a 12 percent increase of four-year graduation rates compared to comparable schools, and a 14 percent higher four-year graduation rate compared to the city average.
## Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

## Impact

Although students are grouped based on data and their work products reflect high levels of thinking, some teaching practices result in teacher-centered instruction and there are missed opportunities for student ownership.

## Supporting Evidence

- In an English as a New Language (ENL) class, the students were working on creating a fanfiction piece based on *The Gift of the Magi*. The teacher asked students, “How do you feel when a book you love ends? What would most readers want to happen next?” The lesson includes academic vocabulary reinforcement and the teacher reviewed details from a current story. After the teacher models the modern-day scenario of the story, students are asked to work together to analyze character, setting, conflict, and resolution in a modern-day setting to begin to outline their own fanfiction writing piece. Students are grouped based on baseline assessment of writing a story. Since the unit focus for inquiry is citing evidence, higher learners are paired with low learners who struggled in citing and analyzing evidence. However, most students are working individually on the assignment and not working together as collaborative partners as intended by the teacher and outlined within the lesson plan.

- In an English class, students use context clues to determine author’s meaning in *Blaxicans*. The teacher employed a think-pair-share-write strategy for students to engage in discussion during the do now as the teacher displayed an image of a Spaniard and an Indian who produced a mestizo baby. Students are asked, “Based on the image and the image and the caption, what is mestizo? Explain your answer.” During a whole class discussion, involving several students directing responses to each other, one student connected the discussion to his personal experiences and responded, “I would have inferred if I could have been European. In my own experience, mestizo is a white Mexican.” A mini-lesson followed on context clues. Students were provided a graphic organizer to provide their claim, using context clues, and to identify what the author means when he says “mestizaje society.” The students working in groups of four were asked to list three quotes from the text they annotated during the previous class session that support their claim and to explain how the quotes support their claim and why they selected those quotes. Students were working collaboratively in groups and one student responded that he was ahead of the rest of the class because he had an opportunity to work on his assignment previously during a pull-out session.

- In a science class lesson about how weathering and erosion relate to the rock cycle, most students were working in collaborative groups charting sedimentary rocks and igneous rocks. A few students were observed not participating with their group as other members worked on their rock cycle charts. Each group had an opportunity to share out their findings to the whole class as it related to the rock cycle. The teacher took opportunities to check for understanding with the entire class regarding specifics to what was shared out by the student group presenting.
Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts with a focus on content-specific writing. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Curricula alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts builds coherence to promote college and career readiness for all learners. Diverse learners have access to the curricula and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Review of curricular documents revealed alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and New York State content standards where applicable, as well as integration of the instructional shifts across grades and content areas. English unit plans and lesson plans are aligned to Common Core New York City (NYC) Department of Education (DOE) ELA curriculum Collections, and math unit plans and lesson plans are aligned to the EngageNY algebra and geometry curricula. The school also ensures curricular coherence with the NYC Social Studies Scope and Sequence and the science New York State (NYS) Standards and Next Generation Science Standards.

- Lessons are refined for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. During inquiry team meetings, teachers selected a core of students, high, middle, ENL, and students with disabilities, and analyze writing and alignment to standards and make corresponding adjustments to curricula. For example, during an inquiry team meeting, after teachers analyze a student’s writing who was struggling with composing paragraphs leading to an essay, they make refinements to the supports for the student, including the teacher modeling and reinforcing the MEAT (main idea, evidence, analysis, transition) paragraph building model that is used in the ENL teacher’s class, highlighting keywords of the NYS Common Core writing rubric, and use of a graphic organizer for organization of evidence and building the student's essay. The assistant principal works with English/ENL teachers to create new lesson plans for unit plans that are modified from EngageNY and Collections to meet the needs of specific groups of students. Co-teachers meet to make purposeful adjustments to lessons for students with individual education plans (IEPs). A global studies teacher is integrating NYC Social Science curriculum and New Visions material into unit plans and lesson plans with support and feedback from the assistant principal and a Teaching Matters consultant.

- Unit plans consistently challenge students to utilize rigorous habits in the course of instruction. Learning objective statements in unit plans include, “Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text” and “Relate the domain and range in context (word problems).” Additionally, students are to consistently write and connect their writing to evidence from the text. Lesson plans consistently detailed high-level questions. Examples of higher-order questions found in curricular documents are, “How do people respond to injustice and promote change?”, “How can we find the domain and range of relations and functions?” and “Why might reading literature be a way for a society to protect itself from the oppressive aspects of itself?”
Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and grading policies 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. Assessment data is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- A schoolwide grading policy is established in the school’s online grading program, JumpRope. Rubrics include the NYS Examination in ELA for Common Core writing and the Global and US History Regents Document-Based Essay Rubric. Teachers and students use rubrics to set expectations for student work and to grade written work. Students also use common self-assessment checklists on topics such as peer editing, planning, revising, informative writing, and opinion writing. Additionally, rubrics were used as assessment and feedback tools attached to work displayed on bulletin boards in hallways and in classrooms.

- The school uses interim, baseline, and midyear assessments across content areas and Regents rubrics for writing across content areas. An item analysis of Common Core word problems resulted in next steps. Teachers found that the percent of correct answers and work shown is the same, which means that students who understand how to do the work are completing it and showing their work, but only 19 percent of students understand how to label the steps of their work. The next steps are to review how to answer this question type in a following lesson and to detail how to label steps taken to find the solution of a word problem.

- Across classrooms, samples of student work products showed teacher-written actionable feedback directing students to the steps they should take to strengthen their work. Some examples of that feedback were, “Cite more textual evidence. Be more detailed in your responses. Carefully consider your word choices”, “Your writing needs more structure. This is a lot of summary but not enough analysis of the relationship between Desdemona and Othello”, and “Good use of evidence. You tell your reader why you use the quotes you did.” Based on the feedback, students benefit from being given opportunities to revise their work and improve their grades. One student spoke to how her teacher’s feedback helped, “I wasn’t too good at first, the teacher helped me on it and I could be a little better. I got more details and evidence for my questions, giving more evidence for my reasoning and for my answer.”
Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:** 3.4 High Expectations

**Rating:** Proficient

**Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations with a marking period share session and provide training to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning.

**Impact**

Communication and professional development around high expectations results in effective professional growth of adults. High expectations for all students are maintained and supported through clear, focused and effective feedback so that students are prepared for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers meet with the principal during a marking period share session to review scholarship data every six weeks with a portfolio binder. Each teacher is required to put together a binder of scholarship data for all of their classes and come prepared to discuss with the principal. The portfolio binder includes an instructional goal set by the teacher, for example, “Increasing student engagement though content-specific writing that promotes discourse.” One example of a reviewed teacher portfolio binder also includes data for the fall baseline assessment and a breakdown of an item analysis for citing evidence for students who became a focus and were provided with feedback and given the same activity with a different task. The teacher provided the updated task and the rubric used to assess the activity in the portfolio binder. Also included are unit plans with essential questions, learning objectives, and assessments including exit tickets, argument essays, and a snapshot assessment. The portfolio binder also included exemplars of student work and work examples from identified students of concern. Common Core-aligned lesson plans are also included. The overall intention of the portfolio binder is for teachers to assemble specific evidence of their work and for the binder to be a foundation of a conversation between the principal and the teacher to review instructional practice and impact during each six-week cycle throughout the school year.

- Students reported that they take advantage of increased numbers of Advanced Placement classes and College Now opportunities offered through Baruch and Borough of Manhattan Community College, “It helps me understand how college benefits you and I understand the material. I get to earn credits for college, when I graduate in ELA. It speeds up my time in college. For every AP class we pass, it lessens our tuition.” The eleventh and twelfth grade counselor meets with each senior student and their parent for college planning and advisement. All students are expected to apply to a CUNY, SUNY or any college of their choice. The counselor also assists each family to apply for financial aid.

- The school communicates high expectations to staff through a staff handbook. Teachers are expected to meet in professional learning teams with their colleagues to improve learning during period seven each day of the week. According to a weekly bulletin, teachers are held accountable for updating online grades on a weekly basis. Jupiter grades is checked every Wednesday and a report is generated. The weekly bulletin also documents bulletin boards due dates. Bulletin boards are due every month, and the weekly bulletin refers teachers to check the updated calendar. At the end of each marking period checkpoint, teachers are notified by administration of their scheduled data share session. Administration also expects teachers to provide students with ample opportunity to make up work and increase the possibility to pass their classes.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

School leaders and teacher peers support the development of teachers, including those new to the profession, with effective feedback that accurately captures strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

There is an alignment of schoolwide instructional practices. Feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practice, supports teacher development, and promotes professional growth for teachers.

Supporting Evidence

- Frequent cycles of classroom observation provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Each rated item on observation reports includes specific language from the rubric, evidence from the classroom observation that supports the rating, and actionable next steps. For example, one observation feedback included, “3b. Using questioning and discussion techniques – Your questions lead to a single path of inquiry. To promote higher-order thinking, consider asking open-ended questions and have students respond directly to each other. This is a good opportunity for students to engage in accountable discourse. Be sure to refer back to Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Toolkit by using level 3 and 4 questions.” Another example of actionable feedback includes, “During your lesson, establish at least three check points for understanding (ex. do now, mid-lesson, and during final summary). Additionally, instead of writing “cold call” for the do now, write out the questions that you intend to ask students. Remember, your lesson plan is your road map/guide to helping your students achieve the intended learning objectives.” A teacher reported improvement after implementing changes suggested by observation feedback, “I did not have enough wait time, moving forward I implemented that in my lesson, and more wait time helped students to process and enable their understanding and process their information.”

- The school follows a strategic instructional action plan, which tracks evidence of progress through monthly success checkpoints. As part of the strategic instructional plan, assistant principals meet with new teachers, give verbal and/or written feedback on classroom instruction, and highlight lesson plans, units, and behavioral issues. For example, “Your learning objective should be rigorous. For students to simply outline the three basic principles of the cell theory is low level. Consider instead, ‘How has the development of the cell theory demonstrate the true nature of science as we know it today?’ This helps them to apply what they have learned about the cell theory in order to answer the question.” New teachers also receive feedback on what is observed in the classroom. Teachers send lesson plans to assistant principals for review. A Teaching Matters consultant observes and supports new teachers with actionable feedback. Teachers attend content area Field Support Center PLC’s in math, science, art, and co-teaching.

- Administration and teacher teams observe classes for Common Core-aligned writing across content areas and student to student discourse. Intervisitations involve teachers visiting classrooms of peers and following a teacher debrief protocol using a Focus on Learning – Intervisitation Form. All teachers participate in instructional rounds and/or visitations, while looking at classroom practice guided by the questions “What is the teacher doing?” and “What are the students doing?” One teacher reported, “We go on intervisitations within the STEM department, and I get to see whether a gallery walk or think-pair-share would be a strategy that I would implement in my own classroom.”