Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Catherine & Count Basie Middle School 72
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 28Q072
133-25 Guy R Brewer Blvd.
Queens
NY 11434

Principal: Omotayo Cineus

Dates of Review:
March 22, 2017 - March 23, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Thomas McKenna
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

Catherine & Count Basie Middle School 72 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>
</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>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>Area of Focus</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 Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, high quality assessment practices are embedded in all subjects and grades. Teaching practices across the school are adjusted to meet students’ needs.

Impact

All assessment practices provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers’ widespread use of varied checks for understanding allow them to make effective adjustments to meet all students’ learning needs, ensuring they are aware of their next steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Students report, and shared in conjunction with their work samples, using detailed rubrics with comments that include written feedback with next steps from teachers. An additional step in the feedback process requires students to provide a written reflection based on teacher feedback and use that in conferencing with teachers and then in completing revisions to work products. One example of feedback in a grade six class reads, “Your essay clearly shows a progression of ideas and several clear examples of evidence to support your claim. Next Steps: When writing your answer, think about transitions. The beginning of each of your paragraphs is repetitive. Reference the transition anchor chart on the wall for additional examples of transition starters for your revision.” The student reflection states, “I read over my response and see how the paragraphs start very similar. I will use the anchor chart of transition examples and start each paragraph with something new.” An example of feedback on a math task reads, “I like that you gave two possible versions of the triangle we were solving for and both showed the correct answers. Next Steps: Be sure that your label the vertices properly when writing the length of the sides so you can provide me with a clearer example of your understanding.” The student reflection states, “I will revise my work on this problem and understand I need to show all aspects of my work.”

- A grade seven Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) teacher was observed checking for understanding by circling the room and conferencing with student pairs using two “quick-check” questions identified in her lesson plan. Results of this formative assessment guided the teacher’s practice as she used this data to make on the spot adjustments to the next steps in the lesson. “Opinions are important and folks had a lot to say on this topic,” the teacher stated, “but let’s look at this slide again – we have to cite evidence that supports our argument.” The teacher then rearranged student groupings, matching pairs in need of support with pairs that had displayed a stronger use of evidence in their verbal responses, ensuring that all students’ learning needs would be met during the lesson’s next stage. Once students had begun this new work, the teacher continued to circulate throughout the room, taking time to individually conference with students as to their progress.

- Across the school, students use checklists and rubrics as self-assessment tools during the completion of work. Examples were posted on classroom walls, hallway bulletin boards, and within student work portfolios. The grade seven informational writing rubric included high-level statements such as, “Demonstrates a literal and inferential understanding of details from the text,” and “Information is provided for each argument, including text-based evidence.” A grade eight science rubric guides students to create a dichotomous key for classifying “mystery” specimens in a laboratory activity that offered exemplars and, in conjunction, a clear portrait of mastery. Another grade eight class that employed Socratic seminar for exploring stereotypes and prejudice in To Kill a Mockingbird provided students with an inner circle rubric, an outer circle rubric, an opportunity for peer assessment using a rubric-based checklist, and a self-assessment at the end of the lesson that constituted an in-depth exit ticket. The teacher, and several students, explained that the self-assessment results will impact the design and content of the next lesson.
### Area of Focus

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

Teaching practices across classrooms, including scaffolds, modeling, and the school's explicit focus on student discussions, provide multiple entry points into the curriculum for learners, though there was inconsistent evidence of extension activities.

**Impact**

Although there were high levels of engagement in many classrooms, most but not all students were engaged in tasks that challenged and deepened their thinking at their appropriate levels.

**Supporting Evidence**

- In a grade eight English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were engaged in a structured Socratic Seminar in which they explored prejudice, stereotypes, and the concept of “taking a stand,” all connected to the class text of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. After leading students through a guided practice using the poem “Me against the World” by Tupac Shakur, student groups were able to make connections to the larger class text. Once engaged in the Socratic Seminar portion of the class, students were able to cite text-based evidence to provide support for their analysis of the text, as well as connect that text to other supplemental texts used during that unit. In recognizing the analysis of a fellow student, another student noted, “I agree with your analysis. If you look at the central theme in *Equal Rights for Women*, Shirley Chisholm states that it is obvious that discrimination exists, so it is almost a waste of time to try and prove it to those who don’t accept it.” Several other students were able to build on the response while students outside the Socratic circle used a class rubric and note catcher to jot questions and prepare to evaluate their peers based on the rubric. Although most students engaged at some level whether in the inner circle of the seminar or note-taking and asking questions from the outer circle, some students in the outer circle did not fully share out and demonstrate higher order thinking skills.

- In a grade six ICT math class focused on using rates to compare quantities, the teacher built upon an earlier independent work portion that included real-life questions related to comparing two products to buy and how fast a person can walk or run to get to a destination in order to connect to the math concept of rates and their use in comparing quantities. Consistent with the school-wide emphasis on student discussions, student pairs shared answers while the teachers circulated the room and asked comprehension questions to check for understanding. Student partners presented their work to each other, justifying their answers both verbally and in writing.

- Teaching strategies across classes offered scaffolds to those students identified as low achieving; however, most scaffolds did not provide extensions for those students ready to engage with the more rigorous content and tasks. For example, although the ELA class experiencing a Socratic seminar provided opportunities for advanced students to create their own extended response questions for the next seminar, similar extensions or opportunities for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking through purposeful entry points were not evident in the majority of classrooms, thus diminishing opportunities for student ownership of learning.
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**

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts into lesson planning. Across grades and subjects, rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

**Impact**

Curricular decisions and alignment to the instructional shifts ensure coherence and rigorous habits that promote college and career readiness for all learners across all grades and content areas. Higher order thinking questions are noted in lesson plans and designs for academic tasks consistently allow students to demonstrate their thinking.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Curricular documents reviewed show a clear alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and evidence strategic examples of the infusion of instructional shifts in curricular documents. In social studies and science documents, clear planning that incorporates instructional shifts, especially the Staircase of Complexity and text-based answers, is evidenced, demonstrating a school-wide cross-discipline approach to implementing the shifts. In all ELA curricula, but also noted in science and social studies curricula, is a focus on writing from sources. In math, lessons focus on conceptual understanding and also emphasize a connection between math concepts and real-life applications.

- Essential questions and tasks within lesson plans demonstrate alignment with Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions that require students to engage in strategic and extended thinking. Lessons included developing a logical argument, citing evidence, drawing conclusions, and analyzing authors’ purpose. A grade six science lesson plan begins with identifying and labeling weather systems and organizing data, but later developed towards developing and citing evidence to support a logical argument related to human impact on climate. An ELA lesson plan notes students will interpret and analyze the connections between modern fiction and myths, traditional stories and religious works.

- Curricular documents provided evidence of emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all students, including students with disabilities. An ELA lesson plan includes modifications specific to identified students with disabilities that would prepare them for the Socratic seminar activity in which all students would participate, which included alternate texts and structured notes. A math lesson plan lists the different strategies including step-by-step instructions, manipulatives, and specific groupings for small group instruction that would provide access points for students within lesson. An earth science plan indicates that scaffolding for students in a microscope-based inquiry lesson includes modeling with a completed dichotomous key and pre-populated worksheets.
Findings

School leaders consistently communicate and model high expectations for staff through use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, with a focus on engaging students in learning. Teacher teams and staff communicate and support high expectations for all students through the school’s articulated student contract and the structure provided by the small learning academies within the school.

Impact

As a result of the consistent communication of high expectations, there is a culture of respect and accountability for those expectations among staff and students. There is a shared language across grades and classes that allows for clear and focused feedback and guidance throughout the school.

Supporting Evidence

- At the start of the school year, school leaders provide teachers with a clear and descriptive outline of the expectations around teaching and learning, organized into categories by the different domains in Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. Feedback on Advance observations reveals high expectations for teacher practice, even where teachers are receiving highly effective and effective ratings. The feedback is time-bound and specific to improving teacher practice and student outcomes, and most observations note that administrators will look for improvement in these areas the next time they visit. For example, in one observation report that highlighted the need for the teacher to be more purposeful in creating student groupings and to use qualitative or quantitative data in forming meaningful and productive groups, the administrator notes they will return in twenty days to monitor implementation of the feedback.

- Each school day begins with the morning Connections assembly meeting. For example, on Mondays and Fridays, the entire school community assembles to recite and make personal “connections” to the school creed. Adults and students were observed discussing the line, “I enter this building each day knowing my effort will determine my future.” This language, along with the student contract that states, “I am a risk taking, urgent, committed scholar,” is embedded in many student discussions and an anchor of advisement that teachers and counselors build upon. Cohorts are also identified not by their year of middle school graduation, but by their projected year of college graduation. For example, the 2017 grade eight cohort is identified as the Class of 2025. As one student stated, “we are always talking about high school, about college, and about the world ahead, and that’s why they all tell us how good we can do if we work hard and why they give us high school classes like earth science and algebra.” Students also spoke to various career day presentations and college trips as part of their middle school experience.

- Staff members have built a culture for learning that provides all students with focused and effective feedback that includes next student steps in learning goals aligned with the school’s college and career readiness vision. In an effort to build that culture through smaller learning communities, the school is arranged into three small learning academies – the Arts Academy, which incorporates performing and visual arts, the STEM Academy, which exposes students to embedded opportunities to explore academic connections to science, technology, and engineering, and the Gender Academy, which provides optional same gender classes for students. Students report that the choice involved in participating in an academy that best represents their interests and supports them in becoming college and career ready creates a sense of belonging. Academy missions explicitly communicate high expectations and articulate supports and a pathway to college and career readiness. For example, the Arts Academy specifically states that students are expected to maintain competitive grade point averages and participate in performances in preparation for college and career opportunities.
### Additional Finding

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

#### Findings

School leaders support teacher development with effective feedback and next steps from frequent classroom observation cycles. Feedback language to teachers is based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and is used uniformly by all members of the school leadership team.

#### Impact

School leaders support teacher development through feedback from classroom observations. Formal and informal classroom visits result in both oral and written feedback for teachers that make clear the expectations for teacher practice and the supports available to help teachers meet them.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Prior to formal observation cycles beginning, the leadership team performed classroom observations on all thirty-five teachers together as a method of creating an extended norming activity to create greater coherence across all members of the team in how they evaluate teacher practice and how they provide supports across the school. These classroom observations also served to demonstrate to teachers how important the observation and feedback process is considered by leadership. Teachers noted that “administrators are always in our rooms; it’s normal, and they are always giving feedback.” Teachers also noted that all classrooms have an open door policy, and administrator-encouraged intervisitations from other teachers are also part of standard practice. For example, while intervisitations were noted as some next steps in written observations, it was also a next step from the teacher team meeting observed during the review.

- Each rated item on observation reports includes specific language from the Danielson rubric, evidence from the classroom observation that supports the rating, along with actionable next steps designed to help teachers improve student outcomes. For example, a teacher’s observation report contained feedback specific to engaging students in learning. The feedback reads, “To maintain highly effective questioning and discussion practices in your lessons, allow students to select the themes and relevant texts for future lessons including Socratic seminars.” Other feedback included, “Engage students in on-demand written tasks before and after discussions to assess their growth in text analysis, determining central ideas across several texts, citing evidence, and making counter claims.” A time frame of ten days was noted to allow the teacher to incorporate the feedback before a follow-up observation.

- School leaders meet with teachers to facilitate student data review sessions during which student data is reviewed relative to achievement gaps, successes, challenges, progress benchmarks and intervention planning. This practice of data review and support planning led to the collaborative schoolwide decision to focus on infusing literacy across all grades and subjects through common practices. Goal setting and observation planning addresses this focus and is incorporated in observation feedback.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

Across all grades and content areas, teachers are engaged in inquiry-based teams that collaborate in regularly scheduled meetings with a focus on the school’s instructional goals and implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures, such as the multiple team leadership opportunities, are in place throughout the school.

Impact

Teachers’ collaborations have strengthened their instructional capacity. Across the school, teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school data team analyzed three pieces of grade seven student work for students that had been identified through a Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) schoolwide assessment. Team members had identified these three students as being able to identify literary devices, but still lagging in comprehension. Using assessment data as well as examples of student work, team members explored each student’s responses. One member noted, “This student used the Turn the Question Around (TTQA) strategy, but not consistently.” Two other members noted the same for the student work they reviewed. “It is becoming clear that some students don’t have a clear grasp of the strategy,” one teacher said, “so it’s even clearer that we have to go back to instruction and planning.” Data showed that one grade seven teacher had a higher level of success with his students in this assessment, and the team laid out next steps that included discussion and intervisitations with that teacher.

- Teachers have strengthened their instructional capacity through the multiple team collaborations throughout the school. In addition to grade and department teams, the school also has opportunities for growth and collaboration on the data team. The most comprehensive teacher team opportunity, the extended leadership team, is comprised of ten teachers and four administrators. This team focuses on areas of improvement based on Quality Review, CEP goals, and state assessment data. Each teacher-leader on the team manages a group of three to four teachers focused on a particular area for improvement, ranging from parental engagement, to professional development to positive learning environment and restorative practices.

- There is a grade seven pilot team that was created based on state assessments results from the prior year. The school data team found that current grade seven students had the biggest declines in assessment performance from sixth to seventh grade. This created additional opportunity for the grade seven team to explore and analyze academic interventions with implications for the whole school. The work of this team led to schoolwide changes such as the Word Generation daily vocabulary building pilot, an additional Response to Intervention period added to the school day, and an increased number of team teaching classes to provide more opportunities for small group instruction.