Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Elm Tree Elementary School
Elementary 24Q211
86-37 53rd Ave.
Queens
NY 11373

Principal: Donna Estro

Dates of Review:
March 15, 2017 - March 16, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier
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

Elm Tree Elementary School serves students in grade K through grade 3. 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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rating</strong></td>
</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

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

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

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

A culture of mutual accountability exists around observation feedback and in monthly *Breakfast with the Principal* sessions. Information sharing and communication through online platforms with families support students in their academic progress.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* as the standard for professionalism and high quality instruction. Rated items on classroom observation reports include language from the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* along with specific detailed evidence from the observed class to support the rating. School leaders embed high expectations in these observation reports by ensuring that in addition to items rated as developing, items rated as effective and highly effective are equally accompanied by feedback on how the observed teacher can improve practice in order to increase student success. Additionally, teachers hold each other accountable to contributing to each others’ growth as teachers through intervisitations and the expectation that all teachers contribute constructive feedback afterward.

- High expectations are shared with teachers via memorandum covering a vast array of school governance and instructional topics. These memoranda convey expectations for teacher intervisitations, the availability of instructional videos to watch during lunch and learn sessions covering topics such as classroom management and guided reading, dual language classroom set-up procedures, lesson planning for guided and shared reading, math, writing, and phonics lessons, as well as the design and delivery of remedial small-group instruction. In addition to these measures, all teachers take part in monthly breakfast meetings with the principal. Although teachers determine the agenda, item discussions have covered topics ranging from instruction to learning environment and teacher team foci. This forum serves as a venue in which accountability and high expectations are mutually shared. One teacher stated, and all present agreed, “At *Breakfast with the Principal*, we share and bounce ideas off each other. The principal asks us what we need from her and we ask her what she needs from us.”

- School leaders and staff members use online platforms, emails, texts, phone calls, monthly and weekly newsletters, the school’s website as well as a parent-student handbook to communicate high expectations to all students and families. Interim progress reports are shared with parents and students in addition to citywide report card distribution. Book marks are also shared that give regular updates as to students’ current reading level. Parents reported that accessibility not only to current reading levels as well as current assignments has empowered them to actively support their children’s academic success. Additionally, the online platform not only allows for easy communication between parents and school faculty, but also with other parents. A conversation between parents as to which assignment was due on a particular date and how they could support each other in making sure their children successfully complete that work was shared. Other parents spoke to similar experiences they have had with parents and faculty in helping to support their children. Parents also praised the consistent translation services, including their childrens’ progress reports and notifications about reading level progress.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings
Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation in most classes.

Impact
While teaching strategies provided multiple entry points for students on the low- and mid-levels, differentiation providing leveled work to meet the needs of the highest achieving students was not evident in all classes. Additionally, while student work products and discussions reflected high levels of student thinking and participation in most classes, this was not evident in all classes.

Supporting Evidence

- During a grade two literacy class, students were learning about compound words. The teacher worked with the remedial group on creating compound words by pulling together two separate words while the remainder of the class engaged in separating compound words into two separate words. In a grade two math class, students were learning how to use place-model blocks and drawings to model and write three-digit numbers. While there was a remediation station where students were re-taught the lesson on how to use base ten blocks to write three-digit numbers, the remainder of students in this class were engaged in the same material, without differentiation to address high-achieving student needs. Additionally, during a grade three science class, students were learning about what happens to a solid when it is mixed with water. The teacher offered targeted support to the remediation group while all students in the class worked with identical supporting materials, lacking embedded scaffolds that would allow for higher-achieving student-specific entry points into the lesson.

- A class in which entry points into learning were provided for students on low-, mid- and high-levels of achievement was a grade-three math lesson on measuring elapsed time. Students were divided into one of three differentiated groups based on whether students needed remediation, were on-level or were high-achieving students. During a grade one reading lesson, students read leveled texts while the teacher conferred with individual students, inquiring into their individual understandings of the text. Additionally, during a kindergarten reading lesson, students worked with a shared title. Students of different levels were supported by leveled questions and different scaffolds posted on anchor charts throughout the room.

- Students were engaged in high levels of thinking and participation in most classes. During a grade two literacy class, students were asked to think about the definition of a compound word. Once all students indicated through a hand signal that they were prepared with a definition, they were then instructed to turn to a partner and teach the definition of a compound word to their respective peers. During a grade three literacy class, students read a non-fiction work about Frederick Douglass and discussed that work using the quote “Without a struggle, there can be no progress” to guide their student-to-student conversations. However, in a grade one reading lesson in which students were to compare and contract characters from a book, the teacher asked questions as to the characters’ differences and similarities for which individual student replies were elicited and accepted without asking students to engage each other in conversation about possible answers to those questions.
**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 the Common Core State Standards and integrate the instructional shifts and academic vocabulary. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills in unit and lesson plans.

**Impact**
Curricula are coherent and promote college and career readiness. Additionally, curricula and tasks emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills using necessary instructional modifications across grades and subjects so that all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs), are supported.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Review of curriculum maps and lesson plans across grades and content areas reveals alignment with Common Core State Standards and integration of the instructional shifts. The instructional shift concerned with building student fluency in math concepts is evident in a grade two math lesson plan. In that plan, students are tasked with a quick drill of a word problem. That same math shift is evident in a grade three math lesson plan that tasks students with drilling the multiplication table for eight. The instructional shift concerned with student reading and writing grounded in evidence from a text is evident in a grade-one lesson plan where students are to compare and contrast two characters from a book and support their findings with evidence from the text. In a grade three reading lesson plan, students are tasked with discussing their interpretation of a quote by Frederick Douglass with textual evidence from a non-fiction book about the same man. Additionally, multiple unit and lesson plans contain the academic vocabulary students would study prior to lessons that would be subsequently supported.

- Unit and lesson plans across grades and content areas evidence an emphasis on rigorous instruction for all students, including students with disabilities. A kindergarten dual-language reading lesson plan tasks students with identifying specific sight words as well as discuss the different feelings presented throughout the story. This lesson plan includes a detailed section in which all students with disabilities are named and their individualized instructional modifications listed. In a grade two math lesson plan, students with disabilities received additional scaffolds to support their learning, including additional teacher modeling, in writing three digit numbers. Additionally, a kindergarten writing lesson plan makes provisions for students with disabilities to receive scaffolds such as additional modeling and the use of vocabulary cards with visual representations to aide student understanding of those words.

- In addition to the supports included in unit and lesson plans that support students with disabilities are the supports designed so that ELLs will also benefit from planning for rigorous instruction. In a grade three math lesson plan, ELLs are provided with additional visual supports for a lesson on measuring intervals of time in hours and minutes. A kindergarten writing lesson plan makes provisions for ELLs to receive scaffolds such as a repetition of directions, vocabulary cards that include visuals along with translated definitions, as well as anchor charts.
Additional Finding

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

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

Impact

Students utilize teachers’ actionable feedback and assessment tools in order to increase their achievement. Common assessments are used to adjust curricula to reflect the need for increased focus on vocabulary acquisition.

Supporting Evidence

- Samples of student work across grades and content areas evidenced teacher-written actionable feedback. For example, feedback that focuses a student on expressing mathematical understanding in a variety of ways informs a student that his calculation is correct, but that his narrative explanation of that answer was incorrect and that he should rewrite and turn it in again. Samples of feedback that focus on writing mechanics draw students’ attention to organizing their works into separate paragraphs, capitalizing proper nouns, punctuation use, and placing quotation marks around direct quotes used as textual evidence. Additionally, feedback reminds students to add more descriptive words in writing, extend learning and solve the same problem using three digit numbers, and ensure that penmanship is readable. Feedback from teachers in dual-language classes is written in both English and Spanish.

- Fountas and Pinnell is used to determine students’ reading levels. Instructional reading strategies have been determined for all grades based on that data. A differentiated set of reading skills has been employed throughout this school year. Decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies have been parsed so that there is a clear progression of student mastery of those skills. Each step on the spectrum for those skills is identified by an animal. Evidence of the use of these animals was clear in all classes as well as in the materials used to share reading levels with parents, including bookmarks that go home with students. Additionally, all students were able to identify their respective animals. To complement this system, faculty have also created a tool for planning guided reading instruction that contains leveled expectations for each of the reading levels identified by the Fountas and Pinnell system. Students also utilize an online platform on which students are guided through leveled readings. This system also has assessments that the school monitors to gauge student reading level progress.

- Faculty has also created a tool that details guided-reading leveled expectations for each unit assessment to gauge students’ progress in writing. Analysis of this data revealed that students needed support in specifically identifying and explaining text-based evidence. As a result of this, grade-three teachers are employing the restate the questions, answer the question, cite the source, and explain (RACE) strategy. Use of different strategies has been determined more appropriate for students in grades one and two.
Additional Finding

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze data and student work for students they share. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Teacher teams conduct inquiry cycles that result in student growth around the 2016-2017 focus on reading and writing. Teacher leadership at breakfast meetings with the principal has resulted in the launch of an initiative to help strengthen student engagement.

Supporting Evidence

- The grade-two teacher team met to analyze student work for students in need of remediation. Specifically, teachers wanted to measure the impact of the use of the role, audience, format, topic (RAFT) strategy for organizing a written response. Additionally, the team determined that the success of having struggling students use different colored highlighters to identify facts that could be cited as evidence in written responses warranted sharing this strategy with a larger group of students. Initial planning for further developing this strategy included conversation around training peer editors in using this strategy so that they could share it with fellow students.

- The grade one teacher team found that while students were able to answer multiple choice questions with success, they were struggling with short-written responses that required students to go back to the text to find answers. The team determined that they should increase the number of in-class questions that would require students to go back to a text to find answers. A meeting of the same team held one month later resulting in findings that students were beginning to answer questions that required them to search though a text for the answer with greater facility and so their initiative should continue. The team also found that students were not always writing complete sentences, an issue that the team planned on addressing at a future team session.

- Teacher voice plays a key role in decisions affecting student learning at the school. The direct connection of animals with the different steps of reading comprehension as per the school’s instructional focus was an idea brought about and implemented by teachers. Use of the RACE strategy came about through teacher leadership on teacher teams and in consultation with the principal. Additionally, teachers set the agenda for the breakfast with the principal meetings and are free to experiment with new initiatives. For example, one teacher discussed a method of instruction that is designed to engage all portions of a child’s brain in order to enhance student engagement and increase learning. The principal agreed to send this teacher to be trained and subsequently endorsed the teacher facilitating a professional development sessions for the entire faculty in this method.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 4.1 Teacher Supervision and Support
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Prompt written feedback captures teachers’ strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. An effective system drives the use of teacher observation data in the design and facilitation of professional development (PD).

Impact
Formal classroom visits result in written feedback for teachers that make clear the expectations for teacher practice and the supports available to help teachers meet them. School leaders review teacher observation data to design in-school PD as well as determine which teachers should attend outside PD offerings.

Supporting Evidence

- Observation reports contain feedback that captures teachers’ strengths and weaknesses and is accompanied by next steps teachers should take in order to improve their practice and impact on student success. For example, the principal offered feedback to a teacher who earned an effective in engaging students in learning to create menus of rigorous tasks that are leveled to students’ needs, allowing students to challenge themselves while increasing engagement. Another example illustrates the principal’s feedback that would push a teacher toward highly effective in using assessment in instruction. This feedback advised the teacher to embed peer- and self-assessment throughout instruction, including a lesson’s final closing moment.

- In an example of feedback to a teacher on increasing a rating of Developing in using questioning and discussion techniques to an Effective, a school leader includes the specific questions that were asked by the teacher at different points throughout the lesson and offers rewritten questions for the teacher to consider. These examples all evidence an emphasis on using higher levels of questions on Webb’s Depth of Knowledge tool. In another example of actionable feedback designed to push a teacher toward increasing practice from a Developing to an Effective, in this case in the area of demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy, the school leader advised the teacher to reference the guided reading instructional card in order to ensure that opportunities for students to make connections while reading are not missed.

- School leaders analyzed information shared during the end-of-year conferences with teachers during which teaching practice improvement goals were assessed. In addition, school leaders similarly analyzed information shared during initial planning conferences conducted at the start of the 2016-2017 school year, along with teacher observation data from the 2015-2016 school year, in order to determine PD goals for the whole faculty as well as individual teachers. These analyses have informed the schoolwide instructional focus on strengthening teachers’ guided reading practices and the subsequent conferencing with students and collection of assessment data, as well as expanding teachers’ facility in facilitating rigorous student to student discussion. A detailed log of all PD teachers have received by a providers outside of the building also evidences school leaders’ efforts to provide teachers with a variety of information sources.