Quality Review Report

2016-2017

J.H.S. 226 Virgil I. Grissom
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 27Q226
121-10 Rockaway Blvd.
Queens
NY 11420

Principal: Rushell White

Dates of Review:
January 26, 2017 - January 27, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Thomas McKenna
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

<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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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></td>
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</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></th>
<th><strong>Area</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rating</strong></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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></th>
<th><strong>Area</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rating</strong></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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Findings

The school structures such Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), advisory, and student leadership foster and support the school-wide student, staff, and parent commitment to shared beliefs around culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional supports.

### Impact

A school-wide culture of both mutual trust and positive attitudes perpetuates a safe and inclusive environment that promotes academic and personal growth of students and adults.

### Supporting Evidence

- A robust PBIS program, including clear school-wide expectations for behavior paired with an incentive structure to celebrate successes through daily recognition events, weekly “star-bucks” awards, and monthly school-wide celebrations, is noted by parents, students, and staff as central to the school’s declining rate of reported incidents and an increase by 15 percent over the last three years in students attaining a 90 percent or higher attendance rate.

- The creation of a student leadership structure enables students to have direct access to the principal to present ideas for improvement or voice concerns. School leadership engages with and hears from students at regular town hall events, while student representatives also have a proactive voice in the events and meet with school administration once a month to offer concerns, such as better managing the school recycling program, and suggestions for an increase in extracurricular activities. Student government, representing the student body as a whole, was active co-designers of the school’s 18 clubs and teams.

- Advisory is programmed into the school schedule one period per week and provides the opportunity for developing and maintaining strong adult-student trusting relationships. The personalized nature of the small advisory groupings allows each student to be known well by an adult and receive supports and guidance as well as feedback on academic and personal growth. Students that demonstrate a need for further academic or social supports in advisory are pulled into the school’s “connect and check” program in which those students are explicitly mentored by teachers who meet with them on a weekly basis.

- Community outreach and events occur on a regular basis and are rooted in the academic and personal behavior expectations for the students. Explicit events such as Fathers Take your Child to School Day, a special someone recognition dance, and the Pencil Program Young Men’s Leadership Initiative “kickoff party,” incorporate an alignment of the school’s focus on an inclusive culture and an integration of family and community commitment.
Area of Focus

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

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

Not all students were engaged in tasks that challenged and deepened their thinking and enabled them to take ownership of their learning at their appropriate levels.

Supporting Evidence

- In a math class, student partners presented their work to each other, justifying their answers both verbally and in writing. Partners provided feedback rooted in the class rubric and using accountable talk structures that were supported by sentence starters at tables. When sharing back with the larger group, the same accountable talk and use of the rubric were evident. In sharing, a student noted his partner had helped him see his error in the use of the word *inverse* in his justification, responding, “I disagree with your response because I am confused by your use of the word inverse in explaining your answer.” The pair then collaborated on a revised response.

- In an eighth grade social studies class, students were engaged in structured debate teams of three students each – a “pro” student, a “con” student, and a moderator. Grounding the task in a debate rubric and referencing the focus vocabulary, students in all groups were able to correctly cite evidence from the class text and in discussions, develop logical arguments.

- 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, during a science lesson, student groups were directed to investigate how temperature is related to energy through a lab experiment making predictions about measuring thermal energy in a cup of ice, a cup of water, and a cup of ice water. While some students benefited from the procedural step-by-step checklist and graphic organizer, several were able to complete and demonstrate understanding of the lab quickly and had no purposeful or challenging extension opportunities related to the experiment. 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.
### Findings

Schools leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions to ensure that all curricula is aligned to Common Core and Content Standards and instructional shifts while making necessary modifications based upon student data and consistent formatting of planning documents.

### Impact

All students have access to cognitively engaging curricula and academic tasks in all subject areas that coherently promote college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- All documents reviewed, including unit plans and lesson plans, demonstrate alignment to Common Core and Content Standards. While Code X and GO Math! are starting points in English Language Arts (ELA) and math, teacher teams use assessment and classroom data to refine curricula and academic tasks. The ELA team also modifies the curriculum through supplementing the curriculum with Word Generation and Hochman Writing across grades. The sixth grade math team was observed analyzing the grade-wide, mid-year math diagnostic exam and created a language-based curricular modification after noting that several ELLs were having difficulty with a specific word problem.

- Instructional shifts in ELA and literacy such as building academic vocabulary, writing from sources and text-based answers are integrated within humanities unit plans. In math classes, developing a deep understanding of a concept and the application of that concept were stressed across plans. In a grade eight math lesson plan, conceptual work around rotations, reflections, and translation was clearly mapped and included Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level three alignment asking students to explain phenomena in terms of concepts.

- In addition to alignment to Common Core and Content Standards, all lesson plans noted common essential questions across grades and content areas. In a seventh grade ELA class, the text-related essential question was, “Do gender biases still exist today?” A sixth grade science class posed “What is temperature?” Lessons demonstrated tiered tasks to provide entry points for English Language Learners and students with disabilities, but limited extension opportunities for advanced students to engage more deeply.
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

Teacher classroom practice reflects the use of assessments, task-specific rubrics, and grading policies aligned to school curricula. Across classrooms, teacher assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Teachers provide actionable feedback to students, informing them of their next learning steps, and enabling teachers to monitor student progress. Teacher practice reflects checks for understanding and regular opportunities for student self-assessment that lead to adjustments that effectively meet the learning needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers observed and interviewed adhere to the school-wide grading policy in all classes, and use assessments and rubrics that are aligned to curricula. All student projects are aligned to grading policy and receive peer feedback, student self-assessment, and teacher feedback, all based on task-specific rubrics. A schoolwide norm of all task handouts containing the rubric on the reverse side is adhered to in all classes for consistency. In math, all rubrics contain categories for conceptual understanding, computation and implementation, strategies for reasoning, and communication. Teachers offer clear and actionable feedback. For example, for a social studies task which involved analyzing a political cartoon and establishing the artist’s purpose, a teacher wrote “you have clearly taken a position on the cartoonist’s viewpoint, so next steps would be using the evidence you cited to draw a conclusion that reflects a deep understanding of the message in the cartoon.”

- Across classrooms visited, teachers used checks for understanding at some point in daily lessons. While one sixth grade teacher had table groups actively use red, orange, or green cards to signify levels of understanding or the need for assistance at multiple points throughout the class period, other teachers used simple statements such as, “Everyone got that?” or “Who needs help?” and looked to a show of hands or thumbs up/thumbs down to make on-the-spot adjustments in the classroom based on checks for understanding. For example, a sixth grade science teacher directing a lab experiment on the flow of heat modeled the lab and then asked if there were any questions. She then directed students to begin in their lab group. After a few minutes of checking in with table groups and seeing some confusion, she did thumbs up/thumbs down check for the whole class and found four out of eight table groups were unclear as to next steps. The teacher then broke the lab down into smaller steps on the board to assist the four. Also, multiple classes used exit tickets as a final check to adjust subsequent lessons.

- Across classrooms, rubrics and post-it based assessments are used as tools of support for student academic growth. Rubrics have been individualized to specific assignments as well as the different target audiences for which they are designed. For example, rubrics used in all ELA classes are standardized for the department and aligned to Common Core, but modified according to grade level, task, and student needs. Across grades, rubrics were used for students to self-assess. All students asked could speak to and explain the use of rubrics and elaborate the specifics of each rubric as it related to their class or assignment and how it informed their next instructional steps. In a sixth grade math class, as students self-assessed using the specified class rubric for the day, a student responded, “I should be a level 3 because I was able to recognize patterns in the work and needed no assistance in getting the final answer. To be a level 4, I would need to better justify and explain the work I did in getting that answer.”
**Additional Finding**

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

**Findings**

Across all grades and content areas, all teachers are engaged in inquiry-based teams, each with a teacher leader. These teams collaborate in regularly scheduled meetings with a focus on the school’s instructional goals and implementation of Common Core Learning Standards.

**Impact**

The work of teacher leaders and inquiry teams strengthens instructional capacity and creates instructional coherence across content classes and grade levels which results in increased student achievement as demonstrated by school-wide student gains in math and ELA. In addition, through team leadership and collaboration with administration, teachers are integral to the decision-making processes in the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The sixth grade math team was observed using mid-year student assessment data as an entry point to monitor departmental progress toward school-wide instructional goals. The team leader referenced the appropriate Common Core standards that are emphasized by the department in sixth grade and the group analyzed lesson plans to ensure the instructional shifts are evidenced. Specifically, the group focused on using ratio and rate reasoning to solve real world mathematical problems. The department is focused on moving into instructional shift four – deep understanding of concepts – but noted that a finding in the mid-year assessment was common errors related to vocabulary and explaining the processes. The team set next steps for developing scaffolded language-based resources focused on incorporating key language for operations. Two teachers had begun developing a similar resource independently and were able to offer colleagues a starting point. The overall finding on the mid-year assessment was a grade-wide gain of almost ten percentage points on the diagnostic when compared to the October diagnostic.

- The school currently has four model teachers, all of whom are also leaders of inquiry-based teams, in addition to a school-based mentoring program for newer teachers. In an interview with staff, one teacher reported, “My teacher mentor has helped me focus on areas of growth in a structured way that helps – in between my observations from administration. Our work together on our inquiry team gives me another opportunity to interact with her.”

- In staff interviews, a vast majority of teachers spoke to the benefit of the multiple team opportunities within the school. A primary benefit noted was the coherence across classrooms in their instructional practices. Three teachers spoke about the school’s focus on student discussions and the support of their teams to experiment, intervist, and both provide and receive feedback from team members. The principal and assistant principals take part in, but do not lead, department and team meetings on a regular basis and work to create an open line of communication and consistent opportunities for teacher voice in decision making. Several times per year departments or grade teams share out findings from instructional “experiments” which can influence course creation, structural changes, or improvement pilots in curricula and instruction. The schoolwide decision to focus on student discussions evolved from the input of teacher teams. One ELA teacher spoke about the focus on discussions contributing to an increase in student performance. The teacher cited the grade six mid-year ELA diagnostic, which showed a grade-wide gain of almost twelve percentage points when compared to the October results.
Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and support them towards achieving those expectations. School leaders and staff communicate expectations connected to a path to both high school and college and career readiness to students and families.

Impact
A system of accountability for high expectations is in place that encompasses training, goal-setting, observations and monitoring of performance. Parents are aware of their child academic progress towards high expectations while students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Students and families spoke of their understanding, excitement and support for the school's external partnerships and extra-curricular opportunities for students. The school offers multiple programs which demonstrate high expectations for students and offer supports such as mentoring and leadership opportunities for achieving those expectations. Through the Pencil program partnership which supports the Young Men’s Leadership Initiative and the Herstory program for young women, the communication of high expectations is consistent and clear. An application process, attendance and grade requirements, and continual growth are required for participation and the two programs both illustrate and support the school’s message about expectations.

- Students and their families speak highly of the school and the communication received concerning academic support. In addition to student-led parent conferences and yearly individual family meetings with the parent coordinator to monitor progress, PupilPath, a parent and student online portal, is actively utilized to keep families abreast of how students are doing academically. One parent said, “I was able to see that my son worked on several writing projects by checking Pupil Path.” Additionally, one student said, “On PupilPath, you can check your grades to see how you’re doing, check for homework you may have missed, and you can always know how you are doing.”
  Parents praised teachers for their communication via email and phone calls, and stressed that they felt they had an open door to the school through the parent coordinator and administration. A school messenger system sends daily messages to parents for those students who are absent and weekly reminders of upcoming events. A parent calendar is distributed monthly with all upcoming events including college trips planned for the school year. In depth, quarterly newsletters, noting high expectations for students, are also produced and shared with families.

- School leaders conduct frequent and cyclical classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the standard for professionalism and quality instruction. Each rated item on observation reports includes specific language from the rubric and evidence from the classroom observation that supports the rating along with actionable next steps. These next steps are then implemented and monitored in subsequent classroom observations. All observation data is stored through the an online performance management platform which provides a school-wide analysis for areas of teacher support and training related to specific components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The schoolwide professional development calendar and professional learning plan for staff includes multiple trainings aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In addition, each staff member sets professional goals rooted in the Framework which are part of their mid-year and end-of-year review process. These goals are also entered and tracked in the online Teachboost system.