Quality Review Report

2016-2017

I.S. 250 The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 25Q250
158-40 76th Rd.
Queens
NY 11366
Principal: Tara Mrwik

Dates of Review:
March 9, 2017 - March 10, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Terrell
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

I.S. 250 The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School 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

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>
<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>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Quality Ratings continued

#### 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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<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>
</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>
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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>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff, aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* through school circulars, instructional rounds, and professional training. Families receive ongoing communications through calendars, workshops, and student progress reports.

Impact

The system of accountability in place ensures that teachers are aware of schoolwide expectations and are provided with training to achieve them. Families understand how to support their children at home in meeting college and career readiness skills.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders provide all staff with information which outlines the expectations for classroom instruction and bulletin board requirements and clearly articulates schoolwide instructional goals aligned to the *Framework for Teaching*. For example, this year the expectation is for all teachers to dig deeper into implementing component 3d (Using Assessment in Instruction) as they design their lessons. The administration conducts walkthroughs and provides feedback to hold teachers accountable for implementing classroom expectations. All teachers are expected to model tasks for students, have an agenda posted in their classrooms, group students for collaborative learning, and demonstrate evidence of discussion techniques to support accountable talk. Bulletin boards are assigned to teachers with the expectation that each display must reflect a task, including a rubric and standards-based feedback to students. The Instructional Cabinet conducts instructional rounds to gather information to improve practices across classrooms. Throughout the year, the principal distributes circulars to the staff which provide information on schoolwide initiatives and instruction, such as professional development with the Teacher Development Coach and in-class support with a volunteer coach on the implementation of a new program to improve school culture.

- The school has expanded its pilot program to build a culture for learning aligned to component 2b of the Framework (Establishing a Culture for Learning), from two classes last year to a schoolwide initiative this year, using a research-based positive support and conflict mediation program. All teachers have received training in this program. The teacher development coach conducts training for cohorts of teachers on how to implement effective assessment practices during instruction. Teachers also received training on using an online grading tool. Staff assigned to co-teaching classes received training on different co-teaching models and strategies for implementing them in the classroom.

- Families are provided with monthly calendars to keep them informed of school events. In addition, parents are invited to “Back-to-School” Curriculum Night, in which the staff, across all disciplines, provides information about what their children are expected to learn over the course of the school year. Parents shared that the teachers and administration are accessible to them if they have any concerns. The school sends robo calls to inform families about their children’s attendance and about school events. The parent coordinator provides workshops such as “Cyber-bullying” and “The Power of Expectations” during “Tuesday Morning Second Cup,” where parents are invited to have a second cup of coffee. Parents also have access to an online grading program to monitor how their children are moving toward meeting college and career readiness skills. In addition, hard copies of progress reports are distributed in between report cards to all families.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and student participation are uneven across classrooms.

Impact
Uneven entry points do not consistently provide opportunities for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities to engage in critical thinking and participation in discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade six English Language Arts (ELA) lesson, the students were working on identifying the claim in an excerpt from a commencement address. The students were given the selection with the sentences out of order during the warm up and were asked to place them in the correct order. Subsequently, they had to compare their work with a partner. After viewing various quotes from the commencement address, the students were asked to reflect on them, using a graphic organizer to write a paragraph about what the quotes had in common, and then to state the claim being made. Students were not required to provide evidence to justify their stated claims. All of the students worked on the same task. There were no opportunities for students to use scaffolds to help support them at their varied instructional levels.

- In a grade seven Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) social studies class, students were observed seated in groups. Each of four groups was provided with a different excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. The task was for the groups to discuss the main idea of their excerpt and match it to a quote from an Enlightenment philosopher. The group excerpts were differentiated and assigned to support students’ reading levels. While this class provided evidence of varied entry points based on reading levels, this was not evident across classrooms. For example, in a grade six social studies class, the students sat quietly in rows as the teacher posed the question, “What is culture?” A few students responded with simple phrases or single words, such as “different religions,” “rules,” and “holidays.” The teacher stated to the class, “Culture is a huge part of human existence.” The teacher then stopped to tell the students, “Your job is to take notes. That’s why you need to pay attention.” However, there was no modeling by the teacher of how to take notes or scaffolds to support students at their instructional levels. The students did not engage in discussion and had no opportunities for critical thinking.

- In a grade eight math class, the students discussed how to solve a problem. Each small group was engaged and focused on this question: “You just placed a single scoop of delicious ice cream on a sugar cone. As you are about to take the first bite, your mom asks if all the ice cream can fit inside the cone?” As the students discussed the problem, they were required to share strategies they would use to solve the problem. However, in a grade eight ICT social studies class, while the students formulated open-ended questions as they read an article about the Great Depression, they worked independently and did not engage in discussions about the article. Thus, an opportunity was missed for all students, including students with disabilities, to collaboratively support their comprehension and target key information to create their questions.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

School leaders ensure that students are provided curricula that supports the Common Core standards and integrates the instructional shifts. Curricular and academic tasks consistently focus on academic language and essential questions.

Impact

Students engage in curricula that promotes college and career readiness, with rigorous tasks to build critical thinking skills for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across subject areas, students are provided with curricula that aligns to the Common Core standards. The administration and staff collaboratively selected an English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum that the Department of Education (DOE) has approved for its integration of the instructional shifts. For example, a review of the ELA curriculum reflects a push for students to cite text-based evidence in argumentative writing. Students are exposed to varied literature including informational texts, such as scientific articles and non-fiction documentaries, as well as fiction. Students are developing mathematical skills through a math program, approved by the DOE, which focuses on math concepts such as fluency and places more emphasis on students showing their work.

- This year the school has implemented a new social studies curriculum which provides more opportunities for students to engage in argumentative writing, citing evidence to support a claim. Teachers and the assistant principal received training on the implementation of the program last summer. The science curriculum requires all students to complete lab reports in addition to creating a hypothesis with supporting data. The school also provides a Spanish curriculum which is aligned to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the Twenty-First Century. Music, physical education, and health curricula are provided for all students.

- A review of lesson plans reflects the use of essential questions. For example, in a math lesson, the essential question was “How can I apply my knowledge of transformations to understand congruence and similarity using physical models?” A special education lesson plan posed the question, “What evidence would prove a mixture is homogeneous or heterogeneous?” During a Socratic seminar in an ELA class, students discussed the focus question, “How do societal norms and hardships affect child laborers in the twenty-first century?” related to a text about teens working in sweatshops.

- Academic language in lessons included highlighting the word sweatshop for an ELA lesson on teens in sweatshops. Other academic language such as homogeneous, heterogeneous, mixture, and element were used in a science lesson for students with disabilities. In a math lesson plan, the academic language included algebraic expression, operation, variable, and constant. Teachers shared that academic language allowed students to better comprehend the concepts being taught and was an effective tool to support higher-order thinking around a task.
## Additional Finding

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

All departments have specific grading policies for their content areas. Teachers use or create assessments with content specific rubrics, aligned to the curricula, to evaluate students’ work. Common assessments are used to determine students’ academic progress across grades.

### Impact

Students receive actionable feedback for next steps. An analysis of student work and assessment data results are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- Grading policies across the school are specific to each subject area, and the percentages for students’ content specific grades are calculated differently. For example, in the English Language Arts department (ELA), assessments account for 40 percent of each student’s grade. Participation in an online reading and writing program accounts for 10 percent, and students’ classroom participation along with homework accounts for 40 percent and 10 percent, respectively. However, in the science department, 15 percent of the student’s grade includes laboratory activities and reports, while assessments account for 55 percent, classwork for 20 percent, and homework for 10 percent. In the math department, 50 percent of the student’s grade reflects assessment results and projects. Classwork and participation are worth 25 percent, homework 15 percent, and sourcebook, a math resource, is 10 percent. Similarly, all other departments, including physical education, fine arts, and Spanish, have content-specific grading policies.

- Teachers use assessments aligned to the curricula to provide feedback to students. Argumentative essay rubrics are used to analyze students’ writing and levels of proficiency, including elements such as citing text-based details, developing an introduction, maintaining focus and structure, including a conclusion, and the use of language and conventions. A “grow” highlighted on a student’s end-of-unit expository essay stated, “Good use of textual evidence.” A “grow” for next steps was stated as, “You need some specific quotes with page numbers to help develop your points.” In addition to content-specific rubrics, teachers use exit slips and a Socratic seminar scoring form in which partners observe and tally their partner’s conduct, speaking, reasoning, and questioning.

- Common assessments such as the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), unit tests, chapter tests and New York State summative assessments in ELA and math guide teachers in evaluating students’ academic growth. For example, students are struggling with fluency in math, so the school has implemented a strategy called “practice makes perfect” (PMP), in which students practice multiplication facts to increase accuracy in this area. An examination of the classroom data collected by the leadership and an analysis of a student survey indicated that students felt they had met the learning target for a lesson as long as they completed the task. Consequently, in an effort to build rigor, teachers’ next steps for instruction include reiterating the “purpose” of the lesson before and/or while explaining the learning task to the students. In this way, the building leaders are pushing teachers to continually restate the learning target as they develop the lesson.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Feedback to teachers accurately captures strengths, challenges, and next steps aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders have an effective system to inform professional development and assignment of mentors.

Impact

Feedback articulates clear expectations for professional growth and schoolwide instructional focus. Observation data informs the planning of professional development.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders provide feedback to teachers, following formal and informal classroom observations, in the form of glows, grows, and next steps, which are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Feedback is also provided following walkthroughs and instructional rounds. A review of observation comments to a teacher noted a glow as, “Students were actively engaged in cooperative group work. As groups, they were creating survival plans they could expedite with a limited amount of resources.” The grow was stated as, “Teacher assessment practices were limited to facilitating questions to groups of students.” The next steps were, “Plan a few key questions you want to ask groups of students” and “Limit the amount of questions you ask when conferencing with a group.” A glow for another teacher stated, “It was evident that assessment strategies were embedded into your practice.” A grow comment stipulated, “Pair students so that when asking students to turn and talk, they know to turn their seats towards their group members and begin discussing the question posed to them.”

- The school has reached out to Office of Teacher Effectiveness to provide professional development to all teachers on using data to drive instruction. A Teacher Development Coach (TDC) met with the faculty at the beginning of the school year to discuss the goals for improving instructional practices to support classroom assessments. After collaborative teacher engagement with the coach and administration, the staff determined the area of priority for professional development would address component 3d (Using Assessment in Instruction) of the Danielson Framework. Teachers engage in learning about best practices for students’ self-assessment, including “Learning Logs,” in which students write summaries or reflections explaining what they just learned, and “Comparison to Rubrics and Exemplars,” in which the teacher provides students with a rubric and asks them to measure their work against the rubric, making changes as needed before they submit their work. Teachers also engage in assessing students by taking notes during small group conferences.

- New teachers are assigned mentors who conduct intervisitation and provide feedback to the mentee. In return, the mentee conducts intervisitation with the mentor. Teacher mentors are selected based on their observation evaluations and experience working with colleagues. The mentee reflects on the feedback provided to guide his or her professional growth.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work products. Teachers participate in the instructional cabinet to support distributed leadership.

Impact

The work of teacher teams typically improves teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students. Teachers’ participation in the instructional leadership cabinet provides a voice for staff in administrative decision making.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams are engaged in looking at students’ data to inform their instructional practices and improve student outcomes. The ELA inquiry team met to review the data for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. During the roundtable meeting, each teacher provided data on how the targeted groups performed on a multiple choice assessment. An analysis of the data indicated that students in these groups are having difficulty with interpreting context clues, reading for information, and determining author's purpose. The team discussed strategies that they will implement in the classroom to support these areas of struggle and target specific students for interventions. Proposed strategies included reviewing the multiple choice questions to determine where the students had the most difficulty and mirroring the language used on State assessments in their exit tickets, such as using “conclude,” as many students have difficulty demonstrating a clear understanding of the specific vocabulary found on State exams.

- Both teachers and school leaders shared that the instructional cabinet is a forum used to incorporate the voice of the staff in schoolwide decision making. The cabinet consists on a grade leader from each department who meet with the school leadership bi-weekly. One of the collaborative decisions made by the cabinet was to purchase a new math program in order to increase students’ proficiency in math fluency. Moreover, teachers shared that most of the staff felt that the new program would provide more opportunities for students to revisit skills during lessons as well as offer more differentiation of instruction. In addition to collaborating on a new math program, the leadership and staff jointly decided to implement a new Common Core aligned social students program this school year. Teachers shared that the school leaders are very receptive to their concerns and include their voice in making schoolwide decisions.

- A data review of the Learning Environment Survey and the Online Occurrence Reporting System indicated the need to support students in developing mediation skills. The instructional cabinet had implemented a research-based pilot program in the prior school year, with a focus on strengthening students’ skills in discussing options to solve social and emotional concerns. The program has now been incorporated schoolwide this school year, with students learning mediation options during advisory classes.