Quality Review Report

2016-2017

The 30th Avenue School (G&T Citywide)

K-8 30Q300

28-37 29th St.
Queens
NY 11102

Principal: Vasilios Biniaris

Dates of Review: November 15, 2016 - November 16, 2016

Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción
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

The 30th Avenue School (G&T Citywide) serves students in grade K 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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<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>Developing</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>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>
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#### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>
<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>Developing</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>Developing</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>
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</table>

Findings

The school community strategically aligns professional learning in teacher team meetings, family outreach, and student learning experiences. The partnering of guidance and pedagogical staff is responsive to academic and social emotional child development.

Impact

As a result, student learning experiences and guidance/advisement supports are coordinated and personalized ensuring that students supports are known, resulting in the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- The Responsive Classroom is a community building structure that morning meetings in the elementary school to create opportunities for students to learn about their classmates’ interests, families, and goals. During these meetings, the school social worker supports teachers with lessons on inclusion and getting to know everyone well. In partnership with teachers, she works on promoting student socialization including the reparation of relationships through restorative circles, acknowledging errors, and learning self-regulations skills. These class meetings also serve as observation collection times and points of intervention for the child study team.

- In middle school, students participate in small advisory meetings that focus on learning how to make better choices. Advisory provides students with the opportunity to “check in” and share concerns in a safe environment. At the middle school, the newly hired guidance counselor interacts with students during arrival, breakfast, lunch, and dismissal. Students learn to advocate for themselves, gain confidence in their presentation skills, and learn self-talk strategies that prepare them to deal with adversity, frustration, and developing perseverance and determination. The guidance counselor uses this and similar forums to provide articulation supports such as tutoring and preparation for high school. At a student meeting, students stated that there is a large safety net of adults who they know well and help every step along their way, including summers.

- To ensure that professional learning opportunities and parent outreach are aligned to student observations and needs, school leaders have daily conversations with the social worker and the guidance counselors. In addition to this, there are weekly cabinet meetings with teacher leads to discuss school culture and the data from “Child Study.” These observations then form the basis of professional development or student opportunities. A need observed in a kindergarten class resulted in collaboration between the social worker and a teacher to develop a picture book of “self-talk” strategies. This book was then shared with all other kindergarten classes.

- All teachers at the school have been trained in Responsive Classroom strategies including restorative circles and mediation. A professional learning community at the school meets regularly to build a common language around school culture and to develop interventions and supports for students. Parents are very well-versed in school culture and during a meeting were able to share how students demonstrate respect, resiliency, and leadership roles. Parents spoke about a trip to the Bronx Botanical Garden where mentor students led junior students and their parents in conducting scientific experiments out in the field as a way of creating community and sharing academic learning and expectations. They spoke about how high school articulation focuses on academics, but also on finding the right emotional fit. Parents recognize and celebrate the fact that academic success happens when students feel valued, safe, and nurtured. Student learning opportunities include service learning where students raise money to support suicide prevention, support refugees, and promote diversity. Clubs like model United Nations cultivate tolerance. Student led conferences promote confidence and agency in career and college readiness, as well as strengthen the school’s core values.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy

Rating: Developing

Findings

Teaching strategies, such as small grouping and native language supports, inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curriculum. Across classrooms, student work products and discussion include uneven levels of thinking.

Impact

All students work on the same task and material without entry points leading to unevenness in the levels of engagement, thinking, and participation in appropriately challenging tasks. This hinders student demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade seven Earth Science Integrated Co-teaching class (ICT) students engaged in a discussion with classmates as to why phosphate levels tested over two days from one water source varied. One of the teachers led the class discussion at the front of the class while the other teacher sat at the back of the room with a small group. The small group sat unengaged, with some students yawning, looking away, or with their heads down. While the small group teacher had a computer the only thing that it displayed was the aim and the same information that was at the front of the class on the white board. There were no modifications to the lesson for this small group and student handouts for this group demonstrated that they were using the same materials as everyone else in the class.

- In an elective robotics class, students worked on designing a robot for the citywide competition. Students worked in pairs in the classroom to create a design for the obstacle course. When asked what they were working on, students shared that they were just following the instruction on the materials. When asked what they needed to complete by the end of the lesson or what obstacles they had in mind when designing the robot, students were unable to explain. Teacher interactions were informing students that they did not need to use the computer or that they were trying to build robots for which they did not have the parts. Many students worked parallel to each other and not cooperatively. When asked what students had to complete by the end of the period, the teacher stated that he wanted students to have put together the basic pieces needed to provide the robot with locomotion. Only two pairs of students had robots with wheels, all other robots were still unassembled with students still engaged in other activities.

- Higher-order thinking does not always lead to high levels of student participation and discussion in some classes. While all students in a grade eight math class used academic vocabulary to engage in a lively discussion to prove the relationship between triangular numbers and the quadratic equation by looking for identifying the pattern of growth over time, this level of conversation was not seen across other classes. In a grade two class, students had read the picture book, *Nasreen's Secret School* which dealt with the secret education of a Persian girl. Students read the picture book and were using “post-it” notes to record questions about the text. One of the pictures in the book showed the main character hiding in a home and next to it a student had written a question on a post-it asking “Why it is forbidden for girls to go to school?” Student questions range from insightful to a request for clarification. Many students were finished and silently waited for others to complete the task. Some students used the opportunity to turn and talk but were redirected to review their work instead. The teacher asked students to come together on the rug for a fishbowl activity where three speakers answered questions and the rest of the students could raise their hands to add details or they would use thumbs up to agree with the statement. Students were observed raising their hands vigorously wanting to engage in conversation, but went unrecognized so they put their hands down and looked away.
Findings

School leaders blend several curricula to customize common core aligned curriculum that integrate the instructional shifts. Students are exposed to tasks that emphasize rigorous habits including Regents.

Impact

The school curriculum promotes college and career readiness and the use of higher-order thinking across grades and subjects for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of planning documents across all grades demonstrates attention to the instructional shifts as there is a focus on students using close reading skills to annotate complex texts and using academic vocabulary. Students are required to read for the "gist" and to stop and jot to collect text based evidence to engage in class discussions, to complete short responses, or to prepare for writing an argument essay.

- One of the decisions that school leaders have made in the middle school is to shift units to align thematically to create deeper connections between concepts and see relationships and impact. This is best seen in a unit called the Watershed unit. This grade six unit prepares students to take the Living Environment Regents and requires students to learn how to collect, analyze, and organize data sets to draw valid conclusions by engaging on a series of in the field experiments where students collect water samples in bays, streams, and marshes throughout the city. This unit is complemented in mathematics learning to test their hypothesis by beginning to engage in statistical analysis and interpreting the data sets in diagrams, table, charts, and other matrices. In social studies, students learn about the relocation of Native Americans and their struggle for water in reservations across the mid and South West by reading primary and secondary documents to understand political, social, and economic forces. In English Language Arts, students read the novel A Long Walk to Water and study the impact of political control over water in the Sudanese Civil War as they follow the development of Salva, one of the child soldiers in the novel, and read excerpts from Rachel Carson's Silent Spring book on the banning of pesticides. This unit prepares students towards their Living Environment Regents in grade eight.

- In the elementary school students are exposed to the Common Core in mathematics in grade three through tasks that require students to decompose numbers using the distributive property and to understand the inverse relationship between multiplication and division when solving problems. In writing, students learn to create narratives by adding descriptive language, dialogue, and details to engage a reader. In first grade, students learn place value by understanding the concept of tens and ones through developing bundles and learning to recognize numerical patterns. In reading, students learn to identify character traits by making inferences on what a character does, says, thinks, or feels. In second grade, students engage in a unit in architecture and learn to recognize architectural elements such as the façade, arch keystone, and cornice. Students then incorporate these in their own designs.
Findings

Running record data from the elementary school is used in the early grades as common assessments with end of units used as common assessments in the middle grades. Across classrooms teacher assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

The inconsistent use of checks for understanding lead to lack of students’ engagement as they wait for direction or support and hinders the availability of student data needed to make adjustments. The practice of using common assessment is developing as grades are added to this growing school. Assessment data is not always used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- In the elementary school, there was extensive documentation for the use of running records as a common assessment in grades kindergarten to grade three. While running records are taken every few weeks and results are prominently displayed, there was little information as to how those records were used other than to select new level books. Students also engage in detailed writing where they are expected to add details, voice, and various author's craft. While a review of rubrics in the hallway, bulletin boards evidence teacher feedback asking students to add more details to support their stories or to add more description. When these ends of the unit samples were analyzed, the instructional next steps that teachers decided to focus on were not tied to increasing content rigor or improving the quality of the writing, but focused on punctuation.

- While both school leaders and teachers stated that end of unit assessments were used as the common assessments in the middle school, there was no evidence that these end of unit assessments were used for adjusting lessons or for informing changes to the curriculum maps. The fact that end of unit assessments were not regularly the basis of adjustments was discussed and confirmed during one of the teacher team meetings. Teachers stated that given that the school does not yet have its full complement of grades, it is very often only one teacher teaching all grades in one discipline. This makes it difficult to have a common assessment across the grades.

- In a grade three math class, students used long division to solve a word problem. Students worked in small groups and used different strategies to attack the problem. Many of the students struggled with the work and the teacher went from table to table providing students with assistance. Although many students were confused during the work period of this lesson, the teacher did not use a check for understanding or a mid-lesson interruption. There were three triads of students with blank worksheets who silently waited their turn for the teacher to provide them with the next set of instruction. This same pattern of unengaged students waiting for the teacher to provide support was observed in a few classrooms. When an adjustment was made in a class, it was not used to collect student data but to address off task behavior such as when a teacher in a kindergarten class asked students to bundle items in groups of ten, or a grade six social studies class on the Nile where the teacher asked students what they were supposed to be doing during reading and received a choral response of the work “annotate.”

- In many classrooms, teachers did not collect assessment data on students. The few teachers that collected data had a list of student names with checks next to the student names or the words “yes,” “no,” or “needs more help” next to the student’s name. When teachers were asked during the lesson what data was specifically being recorded, teachers were unable to state what they were recording. In a teacher team meeting when asked about how some of the collected data was being used, teachers stated that they used the data to make adjustments. When pressed for an example, they were unable to share any adjustments they had made. A review of lesson plans showed that only very few teachers had planned check for understanding in any of the lessons.
Addtional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

The new principal communicates high expectations on instruction, professionalism, and other elements of the Danielson Framework to the entire staff. School leaders and staff consistently communicate high expectations connected to college and career readiness to parents.

Impact

There is a system of accountability and training regarding the high expectations for staff. Parents are entrenched in the fabric of the school and demonstrate a deep and thorough understanding of the school expectations, student progress, and all facets of the school.

Supporting Evidence

- While only at the school a few weeks, a review of documents including newsletter, emails, and agenda meetings demonstrate that there is consistent communication of high expectations including a new focus for teacher teams to organize as professional learning communities focusing on data analysis to increase rigor in instruction and enhance student engagement through discussion that goes beyond Accountable Talk to deep content learning. Teachers are now engaged in professional development based on the book *Driven by Data* and in using peer feedback to strengthen student work. A review of formal and informal observations asks teachers to tighten their mini lessons to ensure that there is time during the work period for students to engage in conversations with each other.

- The school benefits from parents who are founding members of the school and who have deep knowledge about all aspects of the school. Parents are a driving force at the school that continues to move the school forward and provide consistency through a change in leadership and as the school continues to grow towards becoming a pre-kindergarten to grade eight school. They are knowledgeable about the Common Core Standards, the Comprehensive Educational Plan, and the social emotional programs such as responsive classrooms which serves as a vehicle for academic behaviors and career and college readiness skills. Parents spoke about the school's focus on peer and self-reflection of student work as a tool for both students and parents to better understand the school's academic expectations. Parents spoke about close bonds with teachers who provide constant feedback on student progress. Through principal communications and participation in various committees, parents stated that they are well informed in the school expectations and understand student progress towards expectations.

- During the parent meeting, parents stated that school leaders have arranged for curriculum meetings that allow them to hear about expectations in each class and to look at the six week modules that students will engage in. They spoke about report cards, progress reports, and an electronic grade book that allows them to follow student progress. Middle school parents spoke about students being able to speak about their own work and their learning through student led conferences during parent conference nights. Parents spoke about open houses in grade six so that students who are new to the school have an opportunity to prepare for middle school. They spoke about students taking Regents exams such as Algebra 1 and Living Environment, as well as the opportunity for students to gain high school credits in middle school. Parents stated that social workers and guidance counselors are preparing students for their next academic levels, including preparation for portfolio and specialized high schools.
## Additional Finding

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations requiring the collection of student work and assessment data to inform teacher practice and instruction.

### Impact

The inquiry approach is developing with teacher team work ineffectively connected to the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. While some teachers are collecting data and student work, this does not typically result in improved teacher practice or progress towards goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- When the elementary teacher team was asked about inquiry, they stated that all teachers in the elementary school participate in inquiry when they had to look at student work. However, the teachers also shared that this was only their second inquiry ever. Previously to engaging in inquiry, teacher teams only participated in “Child Study” meetings which focuses on intervention as opposed to structures used for instructional adjustments. In the middle school, the teachers shared that they looked at some student work, but the looking at student work was geared towards trying to find a middle ground to teach to since it was difficult for them to prepare lessons that were directly tied to each grade level standard. They stated that teacher inquiry was beginning and that most of their teacher team time was still dedicated to “Child Study.”

- At an elementary teacher team meeting, the teachers reviewed the jigsaw protocol that they were about to use and the purpose for the meeting. The facilitator stated that everyone should have brought some work and be prepared to read an article. The teachers read the article silently for twenty minutes and then shared items that had personally resonated with them for about six minutes. The team decided to skip looking at the student work and went directly to making decisions about what ideas they would adapt in their class from the article. One teacher decided that she would incorporate readers’ response and another teacher decided that she would adapt an “ejournal” with yet another teacher stating that she would front load language. It was unclear if these next steps would address student needs or result in student progress since neither student work, nor data was ever discussed in this session.

- In a middle school teacher team meeting, teachers shared that many of them taught one discipline across grades six, seven, and eight. They stated that teaching the same subject across all grades left them with very little time to differentiate materials for each grade or for individual learners. Teachers stated that while they do look at work for the students that they share, their work is limited. When asked how their teacher team work resulted in either improved teacher pedagogy or student progress, teachers were unable to articulate an impact or connections between their teacher team work and student achievement.