Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Benjamin Franklin High School for Finance & Information Technology

High school 29Q313

207-01 116th Ave.
Queens
NY 11411

Principal: Carla Theodorou

Dates of Review:
November 9, 2016 - November 10, 2016

Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth
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**

Benjamin Franklin High School for Finance & Information Technology serves students in grade 9 through grade 11. 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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</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>Additional Finding</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 Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

<table>
<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>Area of Celebration</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>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings
A variety of team configurations exist for the majority of teachers to engage in discussions and develop action plans using data and samples of student work.

Impact
Inquiry approaches strengthen teacher instructional capacity while promoting school goals and implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, teacher practice and student learning is improved.

Supporting Evidence

- iReady data and graduation trackers are used by teams during meetings to establish early interventions and focus on students with academic barriers. Students behind on credits, or having behavioral concerns inhibiting academics, are identified and discussed. An observation of a grade eleven teacher team included a review of four student work samples. The work samples reflected a variety of content area assignments. Teachers individually reviewed the work and recorded noticings and wonderings. Following a share out, a discussion of interventions occurred. The team facilitator led the group to establish one targeted idea for each student which would be implemented across all classes to meet the needs of each respective student. Several suggestions included assign an advisor, use graphic organizers, and add a note taking column to tasks.

- Established protocols for teacher team meetings include identification of next steps which will help teachers with their instruction and make cross curricular connections. Teaching practices have been improved through team inquiry work by discussing approaches to implement across classes. A focus on school goals including literacy, argumentative writing, and persuasive writing have been implemented across all content areas with approaches on how to annotate and paraphrase. Teachers also more clearly convey expectations to students verbally and through modeling as a result of team discussions.

- The math department developed and implemented guidelines for easing their management of classroom procedures as they relate to the usage and distribution of calculators. Additionally, the use of pre-assessment data (mock Regents and performance tasks) has driven curriculum planning including the addition of scaffolds to tasks, an increase of more space for students to justify their answers, and inclusion of increased opportunities for student choice on assignments.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Developing |

**Findings**
Curricula and academic tasks reflect planning, although the level of rigor is inconsistent within planning documents.

**Impact**
A variety of learners are not provided targeted access through planning supports to cognitively engage them in the curricula.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Supports for instruction are identified on some lesson planning documents to meet the needs of some students’ Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Few of the supports identified included extended time, more frequent use of checks for understanding, translated material, and visual aids. However, modifications to actual curricular resources did not appear to be developed or included with lesson plans to ensure the academic tasks would be accessible for all students who needed them. Some exceptions existed as demonstrated with a Spanish lesson plan which included three levels of student worksheets for tiered support with a common learning objective. Similar structures across grades would support student’s ability to engage in higher-order thinking and rigorous habits.

- A review of unit planning documents intended to bridge the gap and build skills in math demonstrates some alterations to the topics to be taught based on the prior year's Regents data. However, it is not clear how the revisions were established or how the changes to projects, assessments, and activities or skills will yield the desired results and bridge the gap. A new course, Algebra 3, has been established for those students who previously failed the Common Core Algebra Regents. However, the adjustment to topic sequencing alone, does not provide specific problem solving approaches to addressing the needs of those students. Plans do include asking teachers to use a more common language in all math classes, have students “read with a pen,” clearly display their final answer in a sentence, and write using a Schaffer model paragraph at least once a week when solving the problem of the week.

- Lesson plans include a focus on learning objectives being fully understood by students and their ability to articulate them during class instruction. The majority of lesson plans explicitly state what students will be able to do as a result of the planned lesson and incorporate relevant vocabulary. Additionally, connections across content areas was used by some teachers through planning. For example, a co-taught class in English Language Arts (ELA) with English as a New Language (ENL) students, emphasized interdisciplinary connections between ELA, social studies, and global citizenship through a Socratic Seminar approach to discussion.

- Data spreadsheets based on previous lessons were included generally with some lesson planning documents, although, it was not clear how the data was used purposefully to differentiate instruction. A global studies lesson plan document included seating arrangements and some IEP information regarding students, with some groups of students being grouped heterogeneously while others were homogeneously, however, supports appear to be limited to suggestions they help one another complete tasks and pace each other.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings

Across most classes, students were limited with opportunities to engage in their assignments and discussions through multiple entry points.

Impact

Uneven student thinking and participation was evident across most classes leading to limited engagement and demonstration of higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- In two ELA classes, students participated in a Socratic Seminar based on books they are reading, the *Color of War* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. During both lessons, the students understood their role and had clear expectations of protocol. The teachers allowed the students to lead the discussion mostly uninterrupted and explained the role of accountable talk by those engaged in the discussion and those serving as observers in the outer circle. A personal and academically relevant conversation allowed all participants to demonstrate clear viewpoints through the use of persuasion and textual evidence. This level of discussion was not characteristic of other content areas which were primarily teacher led and included limited discussions between teacher and students when attempted.

- An instructional focus communicated by building leadership included an emphasis on the use of questioning to engage students in challenging tasks, although it was not well demonstrated across classes. During a science lesson, students were provided with no visual supports and when asked questions, they were limited to recall and to reading the answer from the front board. Another teacher stated to his students, “You guys are falling asleep on me,” when few students volunteered to answer several questions. Many questions were asked in regards to procedural steps and compliance rather than providing opportunities for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking. When one teacher attempted to challenge their students with a new equation in a math class, it was clear they had not yet understood the prior question, thus not enabling them an opportunity to understand the new question.

- Literacy is a core belief held by staff to student success and an instructional focus found throughout classes, however, the requirement of reading and annotation varied greatly across classes. Students in a science lesson were instructed to annotate the same paragraph and identify key vocabulary words. However, when the teacher modeled annotation on the interactive white board, almost the entire paragraph was highlighted and the critical terms such as geologic age and outcrops were not emphasized. Similarly, during a computer course, although students had the opportunity to reflect on a shared document about editing, minimal reference to the actual article was discussed and students stated a simplified summary of the content before moving on. Scaffolded readings were not provided to ensure all students understood the content, nor were extensions provided to further challenge those few students who exhibited full understanding. As such, missed opportunities to have students delve into their readings and focus more explicitly on making connections and justify their responses were limited across most classes.
**Additional Finding**

**Quality Indicator:** 2.2 Assessment  
**Rating:** Developing

### Findings

Teachers use or create rubrics, assessments, and have a grading policy that is loosely aligned with the school’s curricula. Teacher’s assessment practices in the classroom inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Feedback provided to both teachers and students regarding their achievement is limiting. Additionally, teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to meet students’ learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- A grading system policy exists which includes academic behaviors essential for promotion to the next grade level or to graduate successfully with proper credit accumulation. Department policies and course syllabi further clarify source specific policies within each department. Details related to how the grading policy supports the curricula and all courses culminating in a Regent’s exam are outlined. However, students voiced concern that teachers seem not to follow the rubric criteria and grading policies accurately in class with their assignments.

- School leadership communicates an expectation that checks for understanding occur throughout instruction using a variety of assessment practices, including exit tickets, checklists, and questioning. The use of questioning was observed to check student understanding, although in the majority of classes the questioning was directly between the student and teacher with limited peer intervention. For example, in an ELA class, students were independently asked to consider the characteristics they discussed, although no discussion or checklists were followed. The teacher did not have an approach to track student’s ability to punctuate properly. In another class, students were modeled how to use a stop light activity to assess understanding, however, following a ten minute explanation, almost all students understood the low level question and no further adjustment to instruction was necessary. The majority of classes did not include teachers using checks for understanding in a manner consistent with leading to effective lesson adjustments.

- During two ELA classes, students engaged in a Socratic Seminar. In both classes, the students observed and recorded techniques used by their partner within the inner circle that was engaged in discussion, asking questions, referring to text appropriately, and maintaining proper eye contact. Students who were recorders shared their observations with their partner to help them improve accordingly with their Socratic Seminar participation. In no other classes did students provide explicit feedback to their peers using a checklist or verbal communication.

- Sticky notes are provided to students on many assignments with feedback or Google drive documents have comments added to them while in draft form. Students agreed there was a lack of consistency across grades and content areas regarding being able to use the feedback from teachers to improve their work. Some students stated their teacher provides feedback so they can act on it and resubmit their work, while others said they don’t get their work back in a timely manner and if they do, it may not have the feedback that aligns to the rubric for them to understand how to make it better.
Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and the staff has established a culture for learning that communicates those high expectations for students.

Impact

Training of staff and structures exist to ensure ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance is provided to support student’s preparation of the next level of their education.

Supporting Evidence

- Opportunities exist for students to prepare for their future beyond high school through a work-based learning experience. Students who participate in the work-based learning experience are assigned an on-the-job mentor and expected to comply with all regulations set forth by the participating business. An evaluation report is conducted on each student in preparation for the work-based learning experience by a school leader. The school leader assesses each student individually and their ability to be dependable, demonstrate specific skills, and continue to complete and perform well in their academics. An overall score is awarded and students agree to be continuously evaluated during their work-based learning experience and maintain satisfactory standards of performance.

- An advisory class exists for each grade and provides supports for articulation and college and career preparation. Students are made aware of their opportunities related to industry certifications in Career and Technical Education (CTE), such as Microsoft certification. Mock interviews and resume critique are also conducted with students across grades beginning in grade nine mandatory courses, such as career and financial management. Students are provided feedback on their appearance, poise, skill presentation, delivery, and use of language during the mock interviews.

- School leadership provides staff opportunities to contribute to students’ understanding of expectations and college and career preparation by serving as advisory instructors and offering professional development. Staff use a comprehensive college and career advisory curriculum in all grades to teach all students. An advisory board, consisting of staff, meets every other month with business partnerships to support all constituents understanding of advisement, including financial literacy and certification requirements. Staff ensures a focus on writing persuasive essays and argumentative writing across content areas, which is supported through their own professional development sessions, including supporting English Language Learners and writing across the curricula.

- A multitude of trips and schoolwide events related to college and career are attended by students. Career day offers students a chance to attend breakout sessions and speak individually with volunteers from a variety of professions. Some teachers provide structures, including readings, prior to the event to enrich student’s session experience. Information related to college options are shared with students through a fair held on site and visits to regional post-secondary schools. Additional community supports exist for both individual students and adults to create action plans based in growth-mindsets where community work builds on the entrepreneurial and social-emotional skills necessary for personal and professional success in the 21st century. This is coordinated in partnership with the Future Project and Dream Director.
### Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders support the development of teachers with cycles of inquiry from observations and the analysis of student data. A system that uses teacher observation data is used to design professional development and make informed decisions.

**Impact**

Schoolwide instructional practices and strategies that promote professional growth and reflection exist from outcomes of observations and data analysis.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders provide feedback to teachers through verbal and written structures, including the use of an online platform. Written feedback for teachers is captured in their observation reports, although the principal has noted she may be too generous with her findings. Teacher’s state it affords them a sense of comfort to be honest and genuine with their instruction. Structures include opportunities for staff to participate in instructional rounds and observe one another, with no involvement from school leadership. Staff uses instructional rounds to support their development and analysis of pedagogy by creating specific learning objectives for critique. For example, if a teacher is informed they should focus on questioning techniques, another host teacher will support discussions and allow the visiting teacher to conduct several intervisitations. One science teacher shared how his participation in the intervisitation supported his development of building on student responses and creating opportunities for more student involvement. Another teacher shared she focused on methods to allow for more self-monitoring among students.

- Teachers are given opportunities to lead professional development sessions which directly support their instruction and lead to student learning across grades and content areas. In ELA and math, teachers have taken a lead role in the development of curriculum maps and unit plans. They have also given input into the planning of curriculum and selection of CTE certification components. An additional focus to get CTE partners and develop skills for college and career is conducted with teachers built in leadership regarding budget and communication.

- A professional development session addressing working with data focused on the use of student information and a graduation tracker. Teachers shared Regent exam analysis results, iReady data, and mock Regent's exam data. Participants were asked to consider how they could contribute to closing the literacy gap across grades and make notice of any discrepancies they saw in the data. Patterns and trends were identified and teachers are asked to attend outside professional learning activities which they could turn-key information with their peers.

- Professional literature and research based articles are shared with all teachers based on the cycle of inquiry and trends from observations. One article shared with teachers recently focused on giving and receiving feedback. Teachers use the information to improve their instruction and refer to it during discussions with their peers and supervisor.