Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Community Voices Middle School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 29Q356
145-00 Springfield Blvd.
Queens
NY 11413

Principal: Ryan Branch

Dates of Review:
May 23, 2017 - May 24, 2017

LeadReviewer: Rosemary Stuart
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

Community Voices 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](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>
</tr>
</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>Area of Celebration</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>
</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

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: Proficient |

Findings

The culture of the school is built on providing students with social-emotional support in addition to academic programs. Clubs and advisory classes are built into the program of the school day.

Impact

The school environment is respectful, conducive to student and adult learning, and regularly includes student voice in many school activities. Each student is well known by classroom and advisory teachers who collaborate to meet their learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and school leaders create a safe, respectful environment. One focus of professional learning involves recognizing the importance of how all staff members speak to children. School leaders have implemented a program to address the mental health of adults so they have the tools they need to support adolescent students. Parents agreed that their children are safe at this school. One parent stated that she plans to send her younger children here because she feels it will nurture them and prepare them for high school.

- Students have a voice in decisions that impact their learning as well as the quality of their school life. The student handbook has a section on the definition of student voice that reminds students, “I can question, listen and speak up,” and “I can work with my peers in order to affect change.” There is an active student government that organizes and leads monthly town hall meetings for all grades. Topics for the theme-based town hall meetings are selected by the students and they perform music, recite poetry, or watch student-created videos related to the theme. One student stated, “This school teaches me to speak up, we can talk at assemblies.”

- School leaders have put in place a program to reinforce behaviors that lead to academic and personal success. In advisory classes and as part of daily meetings, students explore traits of diligence, trustworthiness, and self-expression. The sixth-grade advisory program includes topics such as diligence, learning how to learn, and self-efficacy. There is a monthly character trait that is the focus of instruction in the advisory classes. During the month of this review, there was an exploration of the meaning of integrity. Teachers learn to know their students well and follow them to reinforce on-time attendance during daily morning meetings.

- A group of female students regularly meet with female teachers to discuss issues they are facing as young women. At one meeting, students discussed the meaning of friendship and its importance throughout their lives. They listed the qualities of loyalty and honesty as important elements of friendship and discussed how the people they choose to surround themselves with might influence their academic and personal growth. There is a similar group for the male students.

- Some students voluntarily meet during their lunch time to learn how to play chess. During one chess lesson, students encouraged each other to use proper conventions for describing chess moves and shared how they would strategize about a model game posed by the principal. A parent who helped form the chess club stated that one benefit of playing chess is life lessons, such as planning before making a move, and then having to “live with the move.”
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: Developing |

Findings

While some lessons incorporate the elements of engagement, elaboration, and extension, not all teaching strategies consistently provide opportunities for students to express their learning in their student work products.

Impact

All students are not consistently challenged by tasks that require high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Student work products exhibit varying degrees of rigor. Some assignments are designed to be challenging and to elicit creative responses, while others are focused more on the development of test-taking skills with few opportunities for students to extend their thinking. One warm-up exercise in a social studies lesson on the anti-slavery movement required students to answer a question about whether a bystander can stand up for a victim without putting themselves in harm’s way. The task went on to make a real-world connection with bullying. A warm-up activity for a math lesson asked students to address the question of why an irrational number cannot be expressed as a fraction.

- There were uneven levels of student-to-student interaction and discussion. In one Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class on identifying the central idea of a literary text, students participated in a lively discussion about the six ways love was described in ancient Greece. However, in other classes, instruction was teacher centered with fewer opportunities for student-to-student interaction, discussion, and exploration. Often there were missed opportunities for students to develop and enhance their own thinking. For example, in a science class, the teacher modeled a molecule built with toothpicks, raisins, and marshmallows before all students in the class had completed their own models, thereby minimizing the opportunities for students to explain the way they modeled the molecule.

- In a class discussion about rational and irrational numbers, a teacher did not include the unit of measure when determining the sides of a sandbox with an area of 75 square feet. This omission was repeated during the whole class discussion, leaving open the possibility of misunderstanding the importance of always noting the unit of measure.

- Some teachers use strategies to enable English Language Learners (ELLs) to access the material. For example, students use Google Translator to help them make meaning of class discussions. One student created a menu in Spanish that included items with prices and images of the food. In one class, an ELL student who had recently arrived in the school was using an online program, MyON, to begin acquiring English vocabulary skills.
Additional Finding

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

Findings
School leaders and teachers adopted new curricula that are aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and consistently incorporate skills regarding stating and defending a claim. The planned curricula are rigorous and emphasize higher-order skills across grades.

Impact
Curricula promote college and career readiness skills and are accessible to all learners.

Supporting Evidence
- New school leaders made purposeful decisions to adopt new math curricular materials to meet the needs of their students who were not performing as well in math as they were in English Language Arts (ELA). The new curricular materials reinforce computational fluency, include an online component, and align with the schoolwide practice of using the model of instruction identified by engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and extend. They also adopted a similar science program that utilizes this same model. In addition, school leaders had teachers begin to plan instruction by identifying what skills students need to master, and then working backward to create assessments and tasks that are aligned with the standards.

- Many lessons address skills that are needed for college and career readiness. One plan for a unit on argumentative writing includes essential questions such as, “How does addressing the counterclaim strengthen my claim?” The essential questions were aligned with the Common Core standards and were related to the learning targets of the lessons, the assessments, and the tasks. For example, one culminating assessment measured how well students could state a claim and support it with evidence from a text. The task had students read an article on whether a parent should help a child with a school project. The students then had to debate the issue after preparing arguments for both sides of the issue.

- To support students with different learning styles, one teacher planned to display visual reminders about the timing and pacing of the group work in a math lesson so that students could stay on track to completing the task. Another teacher planned to form groups for guided conferencing in a lesson about the feeding relationships in an ecosystem.

- A lesson plan for a social studies ICT class included explicit differentiation for specific students. The differentiated supports included working one-on-one with a teacher or in a group of three students with a para-professional. In addition to the differentiation by proximity to adults, the co-teachers identified strategies for groups of students to use that included reading texts aloud and using graphic organizers to support individual students.
**Additional Finding**

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

**Findings**

Teachers use assessments across the grades for courses they teach in common, and build opportunities to assess student understanding into their lessons.

**Impact**

The analysis of assessments leads to adjustments in curricula to meet all students learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers collect information by administering assessments prior to instruction, during instruction, and at the end of units of study. They analyze the data collected from assessments across grades and in common courses of study. Often teachers use the results of these assessments to create and revise lesson plans. Teachers across grades administer the Degrees of Reading Power assessment three times per year to measure how well students comprehend the texts they read and math teachers use the Performance Series to assess students periodically. Teachers display data about class performance in their classrooms so that students understand how they are being assessed and how they are doing relative to their peers.

- School leaders confirm that teachers are entering the results of common assessments into the online data gathering program in order to facilitate the analysis and sharing of performance data. In addition to aggregating interim assessment information, this online system, aligned to the Common Core standards, helped teachers and school leaders to determine trends and patterns in student performance. For example, they noticed that grade seven students were improving in mastery related to determining the author's point of view, and grade six students were improving in citing text evidence.

- Exit tickets are commonly used to determine how well students have mastered the material in one lesson and to adjust subsequent instruction, including how to group students for remediation. In addition, students frequently conduct peer and self-assessments. Students used a checklist as they assessed each other’s writing that prompted them to check sentence and paragraph structure as well as how well the writer captured the author’s central idea.
Additional Finding

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

**Findings**

The school leader regularly communicates and reinforces professional expectations for the teachers through a weekly newsletter. There is a strong culture of setting lofty expectations for student learning.

**Impact**

School leaders provide training and hold teachers accountable through observations and ongoing conversations. Students have support from the guidance department to prepare for high school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Students have opportunities to explore their options for high school through meetings and workshops with the school social worker. Students went on a trip to a university in Maryland to learn about how to prepare for college and to explore the kinds of majors offered. The high school application process begins with an orientation for seventh graders at which they discuss the importance of course grades and State exam performance on their high school choices. Parents receive individual guidance on filling out the high school application.

- Many families participate in student-led parent teacher conferences at which students demonstrate their understanding of the progress they have made and the goals they have set for their future. As a result of implementing these student-led conferences, parent attendance has increased.

- Teachers understand what is expected of them and know that school leaders will hold them accountable for meeting these expectations through informal and formal observations. School leaders also provide support to teachers in meeting the expectations they have set for professional growth. One school leader provided an article on setting high academic expectations to a teacher as a resource as part of an observation.

- In a recent edition of the school’s newsletter, This Week at CoVo, the principal reinforced the expectation that teachers must “use formative data to adjust their lessons and groupings to provide targeted instruction to students.” The newsletter also reminded teachers to ensure that all teacher team binders were up-to-date with minutes of meetings and assessment data.
Findings
Teacher teams analyze data they gather and aggregate utilizing an online portal. Teachers have many opportunities to develop leadership skills.

Impact
The collaborative work that teachers do results in improved pedagogical and curricular practices that focus on improved student learning. Teachers have a voice in decision making as members of the instructional cabinet.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers collaborate to analyze student work and assessment data to identify trends in student performance. They create action plans addressing the learning gaps for groups of students. One action plan identifies the standards to be addressed, the percent of students who have mastered that standard, strategies to implement to increase performance, and possible misconceptions that may be obstacles for students. For example, an action plan noted that students might not recognize a math function in table form.

- Teachers lead weekly content and grade-level meetings and participate in the instructional cabinet meetings to make decisions that affect school environment, student performance, and professional learning on a schoolwide level. Grade team leaders meet with school leaders to identify trends in performance and adjust unit plans for pacing if necessary. They also identify topics for professional development that may be needed to address student performance or teacher practice concerns.

- The instructional cabinet is made up of school leaders as well as teacher facilitators. This team regularly reviews curricula to ensure the instructional shifts are addressed and that resources and professional learning opportunities are provided to support teachers in implementing the programs properly.

- At a math team meeting, the teacher-facilitator reminded participants how to log onto the online data portal and demonstrated how they should associate the Common Core standards with their lessons. Teachers accessed the data for their classes’ performance on a recent midline assessment. They determined that they wanted to focus on the questions that fewer than 20 percent of the students had answered correctly. In grade-level groups teachers identified learning gaps and developed strategies to implement with their students. As a team, the teachers determined they would focus on how students were performing on exit tickets and other checks for understanding and not wait for the data from the State exams to adjust instruction.