Quality Review Report

2016-2017

J.H.S. 123 James M. Kieran
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 08X123

1025 Morrison Ave.
Bronx
NY 10472

Principal: Richard Hallenbeck Jr

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

Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich
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

J.H.S. 123 James M. Kieran 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>
</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>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>Area of Focus</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>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>
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<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>
</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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

School teams and community organizations ensure that student academic and social-emotional supports align through structures such as the Participation, Act responsibly, Communication, Kindness (PACK) Den program.

Impact

There is a culture that is conducive to student and adult learning where student voice is valued and welcomed in a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment. Structures are in place so that all students are known well by at least one adult.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents, students, and staff agree that the school is a safe place to learn, as it is supported by data showing incidents and suspensions have decreased. From the 2015–2016 school year to 2016-2017, incidents have decreased from 126 to 84, while suspensions have decreased from 39 to 14. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in level four and five incidents this year. A community-based organization (CBO) and other partners provide social-emotional support for students through the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports system (PBIS) called PACK Den. Students whose actions embody this PACK behavior system receive rewards through an online application. Teachers and students played a role in development of PACK values and expectations. A school-wide rubric supports the use of this citizenship grade as twenty percent of a student’s grade. When adults catch students acting positively, they receive points with which they can purchase an array of items from a school store that include brand name sneakers, games, crafts, and books. However, students generously share their points, such as one student who used his points “and bought a pair of sneakers for his friend.” Students agree that this positive environment makes the school inclusive. A student said, and others agreed, “We learn about different cultures and how they celebrate.” Students also have a voice in student council on which they vote on uniforms, attendance competitions, and PACK store prizes.

- The CBO supports the staff’s efforts to improve attendance with summaries for attendance and lateness, keeping administration and staff updated daily. Not only do teachers contact families via phone, letters, texts, and emails, but through home visits. Weekly, the attendance team reviews the steps taken for each student and determines next steps. Incentives include the attendance carnival with special t-shirts, movies, awards, competitions, and parties. Students had a voice in determining the incentives for this year and the transformation team plans to continue this practice next year. Additionally, the attendance team works in conjunction with the CBO to schedule home visits. The communication between the CBO and support staff is collaborative and driven by consistent meetings involving the key members who monitor students’ attendance, lateness, and needs for social-emotional support. Staff at these meetings includes special education teachers, social workers, guidance counselor, psychologists, and a CBO coordinator. This consistent communication including notes in an online-shared site supports students’ academic and social-emotional growth. Staff and students have incrementally surpassed the attendance goal of 90.3 percent, as they are currently at 90.6, and are on an upward trend.

- Students agreed they each have at least one adult to whom they can go to for help. A combination of social workers, paraprofessionals, clerical staff, teachers, and AmeriCorps members coordinate and regularly check in with the high-risk students, who represent approximately one-third of the enrollment. Additionally, administration has added an additional social worker and an intern to support students social-emotionally toward improving academic behaviors. Students explained that these adults support them in several ways, academically, or with social-emotional issues.
Findings

Common assessments and rubrics to measure student progress toward instructional and individual goals are not fully aligned to the curricula and are not consistent across grades and subjects. Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices do not consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers do not regularly use assessment results to adjust curricula and instruction, provide actionable feedback about student achievement, or to make effective in-the-moment adjustments to meet students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Staff and administration stated that the expectation for checking for student understanding includes gathering data on a clipboard to use for group adjustments or adjustments within the lesson, as well as exit slips, where students self-reflect on their understanding. Yet checking for understanding was unevenly implemented across the school. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, the teacher moved from one group of students to the other and noticed a pattern. She brought the class together to refocus them back on the main characters in each of their groups, reading different fantasy books. However, this was the only adjustment made during the class visits. A few teachers walked around with a clipboard collecting data using a system to take notes. One teacher moved around the room, but without checking in on students, only some students had completed the task. In addition, not all staff collected data, checked for understanding, or adjusted supports. In a science class, the teacher walked around but did not adjust the lesson for those students who had completed the questions on the worksheet, nor did she respond to those who had not completed the questions.

- Feedback to students is inconsistently actionable. Sometimes, the feedback includes both a positive point and an area for growth. Often positive comments are clear, such that a student received feedback that commended his hard work and enjoyment of the task. However, the next steps did not provide clarity on how to improve, stating, “You included evidence to support your topic.” Another positive comment stated, “Next steps, clearly separate your paragraphs by similarities and differences.” In some instances, students rewrote the teacher’s feedback in their words. Some tasks have rubric scores that were highlighted, without a glow. Sometimes the feedback gave next steps and a rubric score, “Start with the y-intercept when graphing. How did you get Plan A?” Often a student received a check mark, percentage, or grade without comment, or with a congratulatory, “Excellent job! See how well you did!”

- Across grades and subjects, teachers give assessments to determine if students have mastered the skills. Although staff has data from quizzes and chapter tests, they are unable to demonstrate student progress toward goals. Students take reading assessments using running records multiple times yearly. Yet the data shows students either had a slight increase, decreased, or plateaued. Teachers are expected to take the assessment results and reteach based on student needs, yet there is little evidence of analysis of data. The expectation is that curriculum is to be revised accordingly and used to inform grouping and content for groups. However, little evidence was provided demonstrating that this occurs. It is unclear as to how staff tracks student growth toward goals. Therefore, schoolwide, all teachers are not yet able to track student performance and progress towards meeting instructional and individual student goals.
### Additional Finding

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

**Findings**

Across grades and subjects, curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills or reflect planning to provide access for all students.

**Impact**

The curricula and academic tasks across classrooms are in the beginning stages of being planned, so that they incorporate access for all students, including the school’s large population of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The instructional focus is that, “Staff will use formative and summative data to provide differentiated instruction in all content areas.” This instructional focus is designed to support the school's student population that is 24 percent English Language Learners (ELLs) and 28 percent students with disabilities. Yet the lesson plans do not consistently provide access for the students who make up a large part of the school. Most lessons are designed such that each student receives the same handouts, materials, and supports and to produce the same products. The exceptions include lessons with specific scaffolds and supports so that students can access the content. One ELA lesson plan includes worksheets that align to students’ reading levels, a traits sheet, sentence starters, and translated text for Spanish speakers. A math lesson identifies three tiers of groups based on understanding of the topic and a few different worksheets, with one designated for the lower-level students to reference and one for advanced learners. However, the differentiation includes some items that are for all students, such as the word wall, perfect squares display, a Spanish-speaking paraprofessional who will translate, and algebra tiles for tactile learners. Although an ELA lesson provides students with tiered levels of reading material and in Spanish for ELLs, other scaffolds are listed “for those who need them.” The other generic scaffolds include a trait sheet, sentence starters, graphic organizer, and mixed level grouping.

- Most lesson plans do not provide consistent access to the learning materials for all students. In a math lesson, the anticipated modifications or accommodations include anchor charts, statistical questions, word wall, notes, and sentence starters for all students. A science lesson plan listed students who require special seating to support their learning and the co-teacher or paraprofessional will support ELLs or students with disabilities using translated worksheets or language supports, but such supports are planned in most lessons reviewed. There is a lesson format adopted by most staff members, whereby the lesson is divided into essential questions, anticipatory set, lesson objectives, assessment, differentiation, grouping, instructional activities, and Common Core Learning Standards. However, there is inconsistent planning for providing access to the curricula and tasks. Many lessons include a list of student groups and whether the groups are heterogeneous or homogeneous. Many include graphic organizer, though the graphic organizer is the same for all students. Planning for a diversity of learners to have access to tasks and to be cognitively engaged is not consistent across most lesson plans reviewed.

- Although several teachers indicated they use student work and data to inform adjustments to instruction and curricula, only a few provided the student work or data to show the impact of the adjustment on increased access for a diversity of learners. A living environment pacing plan was adjusted based on student work and Regents data and analysis. However, analyses of data were not presented to demonstrate the impetus for curricular adjustment or to demonstrate improved cognitive engagement for all students.
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs that students learn best in a workshop model. Lessons inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula, so that tasks and discussions are not always accessible to all students.

Impact

As defined by the instructional shifts and the Danielson Framework for Teaching, all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are not yet sufficiently engaged in challenging tasks with high levels of thinking and participation in order to produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Staff and administration stated that students learn best in a safe and respectful environment when the constructivist or workshop model is employed. Additionally, staff and administration focus upon use of think-alouds to engage in explicit modeling of strategies or learning activities, record instructional moves in a process chart, present appropriately challenging content that is differentiated to accommodate students’ interests, learning styles, and ability levels, frequent opportunities to investigate real-world situations through hands-on activities, and open-ended discussion and writing. Additionally, specific instructional methods expected include annotations and other close reading strategies and methods such as Restate, Answer, Cite evidence, and Explain (RACE), to support responses. The instructional focus is “to use formative and summative data to provide differentiated instruction in all content areas.” However, these practices are just beginning to be implemented across classrooms.

- Differentiation and multiple entry points were inconsistently provided across classes. In an ELA class, students were provided supports to create their own stories, including a differentiated writing paper that has areas for illustrations to support adding details. Another ELA class provided students with tiered texts for book clubs, including one in Spanish, that students self-selected. The books were at students’ reading levels, yet some of the lower level books were not grade-level appropriate. In one math class, students had manipulatives to support their understanding of triangles. However, everyone had the same manipulatives. In another math class, one group of students completed both pages of the worksheet before the teacher had finished modeling, while another group was unable to complete the first problem. Students did not receive entry points to support their extension or access to the material. Similarly, in a science class, all students received the same worksheet, yet not all were able to answer the questions, as some were either not working or were playing with magnets.

- In some classrooms, the level of higher-order thinking skills used to answer questions was evident and one provided students with multiple peer-to-peer discussion opportunities, however this practice was uneven across classrooms. In certain classes, students had the opportunity to turn-and-talk in order to have brief discussions. In an ELA class, the teacher posed questions using one question for students to turn-and-talk, but the questions were mostly at Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level one, which have single answers and do not prompt deep discussion. Students engaged in a turn-and-talk to discuss what happened yesterday and cite evidence in the story. Yet the whole class share flowed from teacher-to-student and back again. Similarly, in an integrated co-teaching math class, the questions moved in a ping-pong manner from teacher-to-student without an opportunity for student-to-student discussion. Additionally, students were unsure why they were learning how to find mean. Likewise, in a science class, no student-to-student discussion opportunities were present. Although some students responded in a teacher-to-student manner, without student-to-student discussion or capturing the ideas before undertaking the individual writing task.
Findings

High expectations linked to professional and instructional goals, as aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, are consistently communicated to the entire staff via the Weekly Newsletter. Administration and staff consistently communicate expectations connected to a college and career readiness path.

Impact

Structures that provide training and foster the existing culture of accountability support the school's high expectations for teaching. Communication to families supports their understanding of student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Administration communicates expectations and non-negotiables to staff through multiple ways including the weekly communiqué called the Weekly Newsletter, formal and informal observations, intervisitations, teacher leaders, and the interdepartmental instructional cabinet. Teachers agreed that school leaders hold the expectations for the initiatives this year that are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. These initiatives include planning in teams, using mnemonic devices for using evidence to support claims, using data-driven instruction, promoting student-to-student discussions, and providing feedback with next steps. Additionally, administration has expanded the number of City Year, in-class, student-support coaches, and expects teachers' plans to include the City Year and paraprofessionals in ways that best fit the needs of students. These expectations appear in teachers’ actionable feedback in their observations from administration. Throughout the year, the administration conducts walkthroughs and observations as a method and structure for monitoring the implementation of the high expectations and providing actionable feedback to staff. To support staff in meeting the school-wide focus, teachers receive professional learning opportunities and support via the peer collaborative teacher, model teacher, and teacher leaders.

- School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path for college and career via the student-led conferences, whereby students reflect upon their work and they present to parents. Staff supports students in preparing for the conferences. Students select and reflect on chosen pieces of work and present it to their parents via a protocol. This new initiative, which started in January this year, has contributed significantly to the school's environment. One parent explained that the teacher guided her daughter to explain her achievements in classes and her daughter explained it like a teacher, “I need to work on this and did well on that.” Parents are pleased with the student-led conferences. Staff agreed that student-led conferences have changed the culture to promote continuous improvement and reflection. Staff stated that instead of teachers presenting, now students reflect on their work. Although students stated that they check the online program, they stated that their parents prefer other methods of communicating with staff. Parents are pleased with the multiple methods of communication from staff, including phone calls, emails, report cards, an online program, and face-to-face meetings.

- Teachers hold workshops for parents to support their helping their child at home. During one workshop, staff explained the reading records, or reading levels, and the child’s level versus the expected for grade level equivalency. Additionally, staff shared skills and strategies that parents could work with their children at home. Parents agreed that they receive communication regarding both areas of improvement and positive feedback. Additionally, parents agreed that they were supported during the high school selection and application process. One parent stated that the social worker and guidance counselor helped her child select schools that fit his needs. One parent stated, “I believe that the staff knows what each student is capable of and would like to become in the future; [this helped] staff introduce them to those careers [during career day].”
Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in organized, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place, including grade and subject teacher leaders and teachers who sit on teams schoolwide.

Impact
Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, strengthening the instructional capacity of the teachers who have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- There is distributed leadership with the peer collaborative teacher, model teacher, and teacher leaders meeting with administration to create the interdepartmental instructional cabinet. These teacher leaders are the liaisons to the grade and subject team meetings, where they consistently turnkey information from the cabinet to teams and back to the cabinet. The peer collaborative and model teachers support colleagues via a coaching cycle. The teacher leaders facilitate grade and subject team meetings. Teachers also sit in on other teams such as the school environment team, where they make decisions regarding school culture, such as the incentives for attendance and PACK Den. Teachers also make decisions that support the student learning across the school. The lead team plans, delivers, and supports professional learning sessions for colleagues, as evidenced by the professional learning plan. Sessions are based on teachers’ needs, as identified in the feedback from formal and informal observations, intervisitations, teacher leaders, and the interdepartmental instructional cabinet. Additionally, teachers attend outside professional development that supports the school’s instructional focus and beliefs. Teachers spoke about a culture for learning among and for themselves and for their students. Teachers’ voice is respected and is empowered to make such key decisions that positively impact student learning, leadership, and social-emotional skills.

- Teachers meet in their department teams to engage in inquiry-based collaborations using a newly adopted Data Wise protocol. Using the protocol, teachers use post-it notes and the rubric to identify issues of the narrative fantasy story, plus writer’s craft, story elements, dialogue, and language proficiency standards. After conducting this review of trends, teachers determine who will write the shared lesson that each teacher is expected to tailor for their students’ needs.

- Staff stated that they not only support each other during team meetings but also to model for each other. One teacher noted that he appreciates the strength of the ELA department and the impact on his own learning is invaluable, especially how to teach annotation by observing and debriefing with a colleague. Teachers share strategies and best practices for supporting students such as grouping, differentiating, and increasing the rigor of tasks. Teachers explained that they appreciate the time to collaborate, because “as a pedagogue we get stuck in our ways and someone else can bring [another strategy and] I will try the best one because we give each other feedback—there is always something else to try.” Teachers shared that working together has created a collegial team. A teacher shared, “If we present a problem or issue we have teachers who will model how to overcome that issue."