Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Leaders of Tomorrow
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 11X370
3710 Barnes Ave.
Bronx
NY 10467

Principal: Sean Licata

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

Lead Reviewer: Debra Tasioudis
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

Leaders of Tomorrow 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<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><strong>Area of Focus</strong></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 Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>
</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>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>
</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>
</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>
</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>
</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

All teachers use the *Data Wise* improvement process to systematically analyze student and teacher work in collaborative inquiry teams. Structures are in place so that teacher teams facilitate authentic leadership roles.

Impact

Teacher practices improve, resulting in schoolwide instructional coherence and increased student achievement. Teachers have an integral voice in key decisions about how the school implements the Common Core Learning Standards, as they improve student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers participate in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations that utilize Harvard University’s *Data Wise Improvement Process* to explore problems of practice rooted in student data. The consistent approach to inquiry across teams and the attention to school goals and student data when selecting a focus results in schoolwide instructional coherence. Teachers regularly engage in eight-step cycles of collaborative work in which teacher teams analyze assessment data from New York State ELA and math exams, interim assessments, or teacher created, Common Core-aligned assessments that are tailored to specific areas of student need. School records from various teams across the school are housed in an online platform and demonstrate areas of focus such as attendance for students with 80 to 89 percent attendance rates, scientific reasoning, using evidence to support claims in science, and interpreting primary sources in social studies. Across the grades and subject areas, inquiry practices create schoolwide coherence in the strategies and approaches teachers take in instruction, such as the writing strategy to ensure that students introduce their response, cite evidence and explain their thinking (ICE). Teachers shared data from the first inquiry cycle of the year in this area, and all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs, showed improvement in writing responses that ask students to cite evidence from literature, with more than a third of students on each grade scoring mastery as measured by a Common Core-aligned rubric.

- In the cycle of inquiry observed during the review, a vertical team of ELA teachers analyzed *iReady* lesson performance for a targeted group of students whose vocabulary data suggested are at a third-grade level. The team reviewed results of student performance on teacher created, targeted vocabulary assessments that focused on prefixes and suffixes, shared reflections on instructional strategies being implemented across their grades and classrooms, with an eye toward mastery of goals for this targeted group of students. Data that teachers reviewed during the meeting showed increases in grade-level performance in vocabulary, and highlighted the number of students with disabilities and ELLs who moved from a third grade to a fifth grade vocabulary level after targeted instruction. This work was typical of other teams that are consistently analyzing assessment data and student work for targeted groups of students with an eye toward mastery of goals.

- Teacher leadership is embedded through formal leadership roles such as the school’s peer collaborative teachers and model teachers, who work across the subject areas and most of whom have a background in literacy, a focus of the school. Teacher leaders support new and veteran teachers and play an integral role in creating coherent expectations for students, adapting the school’s curricula, and collaborating in hiring practices. Teachers also lead the inquiry meetings, as they set the agenda and facilitate the meetings.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices do not yet reflect the schoolwide set of beliefs about how students learn best that includes well-paced lessons, group work, and discussion techniques.

Impact
Students do not have consistent learning opportunities that allow them to demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation and produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices are becoming aligned to the school leader's belief that students learn best when teachers create opportunities for students to learn from one another through the use of timers for well-paced lessons, and create structured student discussion opportunities such as turn and talks, Socratic seminars, and small group opportunities to cite evidence from the text. The clearest articulation of these beliefs was in the classroom of a model teacher, where seventh graders engaged in a Socratic seminar about Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men. The classroom was student centered, and students engaged in discussion, citing evidence from the text with clearly defined roles, inside and outside of the fishbowl. While other attempts were made to engage students in meaningful group work and student-centered discussions, practice in text-based evidence and student discussion were not observed at these levels across classrooms.

- Strong group or partner work with student discussion and clearly defined roles was evident in three out of nine classes. Use of timers to pace the lesson was more widespread, creating more opportunities for questioning and asking students to cite evidence from the text. It is clear that teachers are making attempts to carry out some of these beliefs, especially group work. Across classrooms, students were seated together and often asked each other for help, but only a few tasks were designed and delivered in a way that promoted student collaboration. For example, in a math class, students were asked to demonstrate proofs with manipulatives as a group, but the task was delivered as independent work, and group roles were undefined. In another classroom, students worked on independent research projects at group stations. While students had access to peers, they had no structures for collaboration and while they were asked to research, either in articles or on the internet, they were not asked to cite evidence with specificity.

- Strong, protocoted student discussion that created opportunities for high levels of student thinking and participation was present in three classrooms visited. Aside from the Socratic seminar described above, and attempted in a second ELA class, turn and talks and teacher-led discussions resulted in uneven levels of student discussion in other classrooms. In a teacher-led discussion in a science class, turn and talks presented some opportunity for students to share their thinking with one another, but participation was uneven. Similarly, in other classes, student-created questions were used in a teacher-led discussion, leading to mixed levels of student thinking and participation, as much of the talk time was dominated by the teacher.
**Additional Finding**

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that the curricula purposefully align to key Common Core standards with particular attention to critical thinking skills and habits for all learners that deepen students’ ability to grapple with complex text, and explain their mathematical thinking.

**Impact**

Lesson plans and academic tasks across the school consistently offer all learners, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs), the opportunity to practice critical thinking skills and habits on Common Core-aligned curricula across the content areas.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and teachers ensure that the curricula are aligned to the Common Core, and make purposeful decisions to build coherence across the grades and subject areas. Teachers College Reading and Writing Program units are used throughout the school. New non-fiction classroom libraries and online programs are being used to supplement the curricula and individualize instruction across ELA and math. In addition, *iReady* and other programs are used to create tailored lessons for students based on individualized need as demonstrated through student assessment data. In social studies, teachers are using the State scope and sequence to build coherence across the grades. The school has adopted a hands-on, lab-based curricula to ensure that students get to “do science” in a well-sequenced program, with the Earth Science Regents exam offered to some eighth graders. Across ELA, science, and social studies, there is a focus on vocabulary and text complexity, which is evident in lesson plans and units, as observed in an eighth-grade social studies unit on World War I through the Great Depression that focuses students on acquiring concepts and vocabulary through analysis of primary sources.

- In math, teachers have used analysis of learning gaps to prioritize power standards across grades. As in other content areas, teachers work collaboratively on teams and utilize a shared unit planning template or Atlas Rubicon to create units that focus on standards, differentiation, and scaffolds, as well as essential questions and assessments. Units are organized to focus on dual intensity, ensuring that students have ample opportunity to practice mathematical skills and apply mathematical thinking to more complex problem solving. Students have to explain their mathematical thinking to one another in alignment with the school’s instructional focus on student discussion. For example, in a sixth-grade math unit on ratios and proportions, lessons also focus on identifying and applying specific strategies for solving math word problems. In the lesson, students are asked to identify and apply strategies and discuss their thinking with peers, demonstrating this dual intensity focus that was common across math units.

- Planned lessons and tasks, across grades and subjects, challenge all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, to think critically. As a part of the school’s work with the Middle School Quality Initiative, teachers of math, social studies and science are incorporating literacy skills in the planning of culminating tasks such as a task in which students had to utilize writing skills in a math task on exponents related to blood in the human body. Lesson plans also incorporate scaffolds to ensure students can demonstrate their thinking through work products. For example, a Black History Month project in science required students to conduct their own research to complete research papers or Power Point presentations.
Findings

Across classrooms, teachers create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula. Common assessments and portfolio pieces are consistently used to determine student performance.

Impact

Frequent, rubric-based, actionable feedback regarding achievement guides students to improve their work. Teachers use the results adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and subjects, students receive rubric-based actionable feedback on their work. For example, a math piece on ratios and proportion, observed in a student portfolio, had highlighted rubric component grades (one through four) on mathematical reasoning, neatness and organization, accuracy of the ratio table, and completion of the task. Teacher feedback to the student additionally stated, “Response shows evidence of math reasoning. You need to show how you reached your answer.” In response to student-created questions about a piece of Salvador Dali’s work in an art class, the teacher commented on a student’s work, “Great questions! The shape that looks like an egg might not be an egg. It could just be a rock”. When directing the students to use the word shape to help relay their message clearly, the teacher guides the student to leverage vocabulary in the discipline to convey their thoughts. In a seventh-grade narrative writing piece, a teacher commented to a student, “What a beautiful moment you shared. Your sequential order writing was on point. Next steps: add dialogue to make the reader feel like they are present.” This specificity of feedback from teachers on both positive aspects of student work, as well as clear next steps, was evident on individual assignments, whether on walls or in portfolios, across grades and subject areas.

- Portfolios demonstrated uniformity in feedback and attention to student reflection. There is also a clear and uniform grading policy in place across the grades and subject areas, creating consistency in the grading of homework, classwork, participation and attendance, tests, quizzes, and summative assessments. Students articulated that the majority of teachers update student grades in an online platform, so that students, teachers, and parents receive regular feedback on student progress.

- Teacher teams developed solutions to issues that arose from the use of common assessments at the beginning of the year such as the creation of more focused assessments with an online test bank. In response to new assessment data in the spring, teachers spread the work needed in specific standards throughout the grades in ELA, social studies, and science instruction. Teachers modified instructional routines to create more time for students to engage in individualized iReady instruction and ELA teachers added a test sophistication unit. Science end-of-unit assessments and lab report analysis led the science team to prioritize drawing conclusions from analysis of data, rather than graphing, where teachers had previously placed the focus. In ELA and math, units and meeting minutes demonstrate added instructional materials such as reading passages, extra time, and additional strategies in writing and math problem solving. Common online and paper assessments (NYReady and iReady) are used to create power standards for ELA and math in the weeks following diagnostic and interim assessments.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness to families. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students, particularly through student self-reflection and learning experiences that expose students to college-level skills.

Impact

School leaders and teachers help families understand student progress and make expectations for the path to college clear. Teachers and staff offer ongoing and detailed feedback, guidance, and experiences that prepare students for high school and college.

Supporting Evidence

- As two school communities are continuing to unite as one, the principal uses the Remind text messaging application consistently to communicate expectations and progress toward school goals, such as academics and attendance directly to parents. Teachers use the online grading platform to regularly communicate grades and share anecdotal performance updates with parents. At the time of the review, parents had received three of four progress reports detailing student progress in the major subject areas, academic intervention services (AIS) if appropriate, and extended learning time. At the meeting with families, a parent shared that the school has “a website, and the teachers make their email and phone numbers available to you. You can access the website, and the teacher through your cell phone, and see how your child did for the day.”

- The school leaders and teachers host state-of-the-school meetings, student-led conferences in grade six, and parent-teacher conferences in grades seven and eight to help families understand their children’s progress. About the student-led conference, a parent shared, “My son showed more pride, because he was speaking about himself. His education meant more to him. He was really proud to show what he did well, and owned the things he needs to work on.” Students in other grades also create report card and portfolio reflections that articulate actions that they took to get their grade, and what they intend to do moving forward.

- During the conference nights, teachers and school staff offer additional workshops to families on topics such as understanding the Regents exams and high school credits, resources to support ELLs during the summer, reading options over the summer and why they are important, and online math resources. There are also separate mandatory parent conferences for students whose promotion is in doubt to reinforce the school’s eighth-grade goal of 100 percent graduation with zero percent summer school. Though few parents were present at the parent meeting during the review, parents did share, and school leaders agreed, that the school had the highest parent participation in recent years compared to that of both former schools.

- A partnership with a community-based organization, Career Connections, offers students a sequence of classes on college readiness, beyond the seven weeks of college readiness that is a regular part of the school’s advisory program. Students shared, “The teachers help prepare us for high school and college by giving us difficult work and challenging us so we are ready for ninth-grade work.” Two students shared that in math, “We are learning the Algebra Regents now so we don’t have to take it in ninth grade.”
## Additional Finding

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<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

The school leaders have an effective system in place that supports teacher development with effective feedback and next steps from frequent classroom observation cycles. Clearly articulated feedback to teachers based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* accurately captures strengths and next steps, with a focus on uniform expectations for pedagogy across the school.

### Impact

Feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practice and supports teacher development to enhance schoolwide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have developed cycles of observation to ensure that all administrators see different teachers throughout the year, to create unity among the administrators and feelings of trust and inclusion with the staff as teachers from the two previous schools, and teachers new to the building, become a united staff. The school leaders use a tracking system to note who has most recently viewed teachers, and ensuring a variety of support for teachers who are new to the profession. Feedback that teachers received consistently connected to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and often connects back to the previous observation. At the time of the review, 137 of 140 observations had been conducted and all teachers at a question and answer session shared that they had been observed at least four times during the year.

- Teachers at a question and answer session also articulated that the feedback that they receive, from the district staff, principal, assistant principals, and the Learning Partners Program (LPP), was always connected to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and provide clear expectations and next steps. One teacher shared, “I’ve been observed informal five times- probably more, but five official with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The feedback was really helpful. The assistant principal was the last to give me feedback, and is trying to push me to highly effective. I’m usually rated effective and he gave me next steps to be more highly effective.”

- A review of written observation records shows that observation feedback regularly includes a clear articulation of expectations for planning, student discussion, peer feedback during lessons, frontloading vocabulary for students, and other expectations connected to the school leader’s articulated beliefs about how students learn best. Next steps were specific and actionable, and sometimes included professional readings, or direction to visit colleagues who excel in specific instructional strategies. For example, in one observation, the teacher’s next step was to continue to improve classroom discussions. The teacher was given an article to read and was asked to implement one of the strategies described in the article for their next observation in ten days. Another shows a similar sharing of a professional reading and direction to implement a new strategy for providing peer feedback, with the addition of encouraging the teacher to meet with the UFT Teacher Center Coach about peer feedback for support.