Quality Review Report

2016-2017

School for Excellence
High School 09X404
1110 Boston Rd.
Bronx
NY 10456

Principal: Jeffrey Houston

Dates of Review:
March 15, 2017 - March 16, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Jorge Estrella
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


School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>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>
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</table>
### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>
</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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### Systems for Improvement

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</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>Additional Finding</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>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator: 1.4 Positive Learning Environment  Rating: Proficient

Findings

The school uses several positive reinforcement strategies as an approach to maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that are supported by structures to enact culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support.

Impact

The peer mediation program supports the school to sustain a safe environment that promotes an inclusive culture in which student voice is welcomed and that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults.

Supporting Evidence

- The school implemented the peer mediation program to address the social-emotional needs of the students and to support the discipline in the school community by providing social and emotional support through students trained in conflict resolution. Peer mediation is part of the school structure to address issues or conflicts between students and to provide early peer interventions to avoid escalations of potential disciplinary incidents. Students and teachers reported that since the implementation of this program, there has been a significant change in the school tone. For example, a teacher said “The level of disciplinary issues and altercations decreased since the implementation of this program.” Students reported, “Since we have this program, most of the students behave well in the school and it is another approach to address discipline other than suspensions or other type of punishments.” Students also shared that the mediation program is a way to teach students how to develop problem solving skills in order to tackle problems in their life and communication skills, so they know how to interact with people and can understand people better and build confidence. As a result of this new approach to deal with social-emotional needs of students, the school was named the “Respect for All Winning School 2016.”

- The principal also implemented several initiatives that impact the school culture and learning environment. This school year the school has added both a Boys Advisory and a Girls Advisory to address the socio-emotional needs of the more at risk students. The curriculum for this program focuses on fostering positive peer bonding, prosocial behaviors and future orientation. There are 25 boys and 30 students participating in this program. In addition, the school has three guidance counselors and one social worker that regularly meet with students for counseling as well as partnerships with a community-based organization that focuses on boosting self-esteem and positive behaviors in the at-risk female population.

- Students are involved in student government, in which liaisons meet with school leaders to convey student needs and issues. For example, this school year, the student government organized senior trips, participated in charity fundraising to support the less fortunate, and promoted more college trips. They are also responsible for regularly planning student activities such as spirit week, field days, and Friday senior breakfasts, and in heading a yearbook committee.

- The principal and attendance team meet regularly to debrief on interactions with students and situations that require follow up related to attendance, mediation, or conflict resolution issues. Attendance is monitored daily by members of the attendance committee and grade level teams, and concerns are followed up through home visits, phone calls, and parent meetings. In addition, in February the school started a success mentor program to support students who have been identified with attendance challenges. Students reported that they have several opportunities to reach out to adults in case they have any issue or concern that they need to address with someone they trust. For example, they can reach out to any adult in the school including the principal and assistant principals, within their advisory time, or as needed.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Developing |

Findings

Teachers are developing rubrics to align to the school’s curricula, but offered limited actionable feedback to students. Although teachers are using exit slips as part of their assessments, teacher practice for utilizing checks for understanding and student self-assessment to adjust pedagogy was not consistently observed.

Impact

Most students are not fully aware of their next learning steps, limiting their progress to higher levels. In addition, inconsistent use of checks for understanding during lessons led to limited opportunities to effectively make on-the-spot lesson adjustments to meet student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Students reported that they use rubrics for their assignments, but mostly for the written assignments. However, during classroom visits, students were not using rubrics while working on their written assignments. For example, in a global studies class, the lesson plan includes a paragraph rubric, but students did not have access to the rubric. Student work revealed that the use of rubrics to provide feedback to students varied across subjects. For example, some teachers write notes on the rubrics, others highlight sections of the rubrics or just the grade for the document. During classroom visits, it was challenging to find student work in portfolios or notebooks, or posted in classrooms or on hallways bulletin boards. Feedback provided on student work inconsistently targeted next steps that are clearly understood by students to meet their learning targets, thus limiting opportunities to reach higher levels of achievement.

- A review of student work products reflected an uneven quality of feedback support provided to students. For example, on a writing assignment the teacher’s feedback was “Begin to think of ways to make your thesis more complex. It will further your argument and strengthen your papers.” However, other work products reflected minimal amounts of written feedback only providing a grade score, and/or “Good job!” Consequently, the limited approach to provide effective, actionable feedback hampers students’ opportunities to improve performance on learning tasks.

- School leaders and teachers shared that as part of the implementation of formative assessments, all teachers use exit slips at the end of lessons to assess student mastery of key concepts. However, classroom visits revealed that this assessment practice varies across lessons. While some teachers allotted time for students to work on their exit slips, other teachers missed the opportunity to have students working on their exit slips and some lessons ended without closure.

- Inconsistent checks for understanding do not allow for sufficient on-the-spot adjustments to lessons, resulting in missed opportunities to meet all students’ diverse learning needs. For example, a grade ten teacher noticed that some students did not understand the directions for their task. The teacher asked students to talk to their partners for further clarity and then checked in again with students. Some remained unclear, so he adjusted the lesson and provided supports and resources in Spanish which allowed those students to access the assignment. However, this teaching practice is yet to be implemented across grades and subjects.

- The practice of gathering data to inform the progress of individual students or groups of students is not yet implemented across classrooms. Although in most classrooms visited, there was more than one adult, they were not recording students’ responses so they could use that data to make on-the-spot adjustments to the lesson. Furthermore, students relayed that they seldom have opportunities to engage in self-assessment activities. During classroom visits, there was no evidence of such practice.
Findings
Curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and high-order thinking across grades and subjects for all learners. The use of data and student work is beginning to reflect planning and refinement of planning documents and academic tasks.

Impact
Although the school has a large population of English Language Learners (ELLs), curricula reflect limited use of language supports for ELLs and students with disabilities. Thus, students have reduced opportunities to engage in rigorous tasks that emphasize critical thinking.

Supporting Evidence
- The review of lesson plans show that some tasks require students to engage in complex tasks, such as a twelfth-grade economics class where students are to analyze the national health care policy by reading three different articles, annotating, having peer-to-peer discussions and making connections to past laws and current events to answer the essential question regarding what the national health care system should be. This level of rigorous habits and higher-order skills is yet to be implemented across grades and subjects.

- Although the School for Excellence has in the student register 30.6 percent ELLs and 26 percent students with disabilities, planning for academic tasks to provide supports, scaffolds, and vocabulary development to meet the needs of individual students was limited. In addition, curricular documents reflected limited pedagogical strategies and lesson structures to address the language and academic needs of all students. Some lesson plans involved students in simple or low-level tasks with no evidence of scaffolding for ELLs or students with disabilities. As a result, some students have limited engagement in the school’s curricula and do not benefit from pedagogical strategies that promote student learning.

- School leaders reported that teachers were using several educational software and online platforms to supplement the curricula to cognitively engage all learners and to address the literacy needs of students. However, the review of instructional planning documents indicated that teachers do not incorporate these resources to enhance their lessons.

- Even though school leaders indicated that teachers are using learning strategies to address the needs of ELLs and shared the task inventory for English learners, the review of units of study reflected that those strategies are not being incorporated across subjects and only few lesson plans incorporate detailed language acquisition strategies. For example, one algebra lesson plan includes, “Write definitions of vocabulary words based on the lesson from the textbook.” Furthermore, lesson plans revealed little differentiation or supports that scaffold learning for individual needs of students. Consequently, some teachers are missing opportunities to plan and use vocabulary development strategies to address the needs of ELLs and low level achievers.

- The review of unit plans and lesson plans across subjects revealed that data from formative and summative assessments is not used consistently to refine the curricula. For example, the ninth and tenth grade English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plans use data from formative assessments and the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) to group students by their language ability level and tasks are differentiated to address their instructional needs. However, in Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) lesson plans, there is no evidence that teachers are using individualized learning plans (IEPs) data or formative or summative assessment data to groups students, to create differentiated tasks or to provide texts at their Lexile level. Furthermore, there is little evidence that assessment data is used to modify instruction and guide intervention strategies. Consequently, this inconsistent practice is limiting students’ opportunities to access the curricula.
Findings

Teachers are beginning to incorporate technology into the curricula as part of the use of multiple entry points and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Teaching practices are not yet resulting in consistent high quality student work products, high level student discussions in classrooms, and improved student academic progress across all subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- Classroom visits revealed that in some classes the level of rigor and questions for all students was inconsistent. In a grade twelve economics class, students worked independently reading and annotating an article regarding a tax penalty related to the health care system. Students then engaged in a group discussion about the conditionality of the health care system. In the discussion, students expressed their opinions and counterarguments citing details from the text and all students participated in the discussion. In a grade nine English class, although students were sitting in small groups, they had few opportunities to engage in group discussions. The lesson was teacher-dominated and most questions were at the low end of Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK). For example, the teacher asked “Are all Indians mad? Or are there other weapons?” Most responses required one word. As a result of these pedagogical practices, some students were not engaged in challenging tasks.

- School leaders shared that the school is focusing on using technology to enhance student engagement in lessons and as a part of multiple entry points to support students’ understanding and entry into the learning targets. The use of whiteboards in lessons varied, some teachers used the interactivity features of the whiteboard while others just used it as a projection device. Thus, teachers missed opportunities to enhance their lessons to promote higher-order thinking skills.

- In a geometry class, students were tasked to produce a chart where they have to measure the diameter and height of four objects and calculate the radius, then determine the volume and surface area. The teacher circulated about the room providing support to students and ensured they were on task. However, some students were not engaged in the task. They had difficulties understanding what they needed to do, though some students were helping their peers create their charts. Furthermore, when students were asked about their task, they disclosed that they finished and it was posted next to the whiteboard. Those students did not have any extensions to further their learning other than helping students use rulers to draw the lines for their charts.

- While in some cases, teaching strategies promote student-to-student conversation, there is an uneven engagement in high levels of student thinking and in-depth discussions. For example, during classrooms visits, the pattern of teacher-to-student interaction in full class discussions was call and response, with a limited number of students in most classes engaged during small groups or full class discussions. For example, in a global history class students were asked to engage in accountable talk about propaganda posters in World War I, though only two out of four groups were engaged in discussions. The other groups were struggling to initiate their discussions.

- Classroom visits informed that teachers inconsistently provide multiple entry points and scaffolds for subgroups including ELLs and students with disabilities. Even though students are sitting in groups, most lesson plans revealed little differentiation or supports that scaffold learning for individual needs of students. Teachers circulated around the room and made efforts to assist but there was not a strategic plan to address their specific needs during the lesson. As a result, several of these students are facing challenges to meet their learning targets as evident in student work products.
Findings

Written communications, opportunities for professional development around the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and one-on-one sessions with teachers are being implemented by the new principal to communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff are beginning to build a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for all students and families.

Impact

There are missed opportunities to train and support staff in regards to high expectations. Parents are not yet able to successfully partner to support students in meeting expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal is beginning to communicate high expectations to staff through frequent cycles of observation feedback to teachers, mid-year performance reviews, a teacher handbook, and through whole staff professional development provided to teachers as outlined in the professional development plan. Since his appointment in December 2016 the new principal is in the process of preparing a written communication that shares high expectations regarding instruction, social emotional behaviors and family engagement for all stakeholders. Expectations are also communicated via weekly meetings with teachers and one-one conferences with staff.

- The principal ensures that teachers have access to professional development opportunities to support them in the implementation of new curricula initiatives around literacy. However, there are limited opportunities offered for teachers to engage in professional learning to deepen their understanding of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. To enhance opportunities for professional development, the principal is in the process of aligning components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* rubrics to specific school initiatives, such as implementation of common strategies, and the expectation that teachers collaborate under the guidance of school leaders in designing instructional strategies to address the different achievement levels of students.

- School leaders and teachers reported that communication with parents occurs through the schools’ open-door policy, and that parents need not make an appointment to come and visit the school should they wish to talk to school leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, or other staff. They also send written communications and post information on the school website. During grade team meetings, teachers identify students in need of academic or social emotional interventions and reach out to parents through phone calls, so they can collaborate to address the needs of the students. However, parents interviewed did not recall being contacted during Tuesdays’ parent engagement time. Other opportunities used to communicate expectations are open school nights.

- At the beginning of the school year teachers provide parents with course outlines for each subject. They also shared that students and parents use an online platform so they can keep track of their academic progress. Students reported that teachers regularly update the information on the online platform. However, parents were not aware that the school uses this online platform. Furthermore, parents reported that they had limited opportunities or were not aware of opportunities to participate in workshops offering strategies to support their children on a path to college and career readiness. They only remembered the meeting at the beginning of the school year.

- Few students speak confidently about their progress toward college and career readiness. Some learners are able to explain the tasks, articulate how well they are doing, and what steps they need to take to improve their work. However, some students were not clear about the expectations and what steps they need to take to improve their work. All students mentioned that they received information about their progress via an online portal where they can see their grades for all content areas.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development | Rating: | Developing |

Findings
Subject and grade level teams have weekly opportunities to meet in professional collaborations and analyze assessment outcomes during team meetings. However, the staff is loosely utilizing an inquiry approach to analyze student assessment data and student work.

Impact
Inquiry-based teacher team work is beginning to build teacher capacity leading to academic progress for some students.

Supporting Evidence
- The school leader has implemented systems and structures for instructional teams to work in collaborative grade level and content area teams where teachers meet a minimum of two times per week. Teachers are beginning to embed protocols for looking at student work and norms for discussion among team members to ensure that teams engage in inquiry work aligned to Common Core Learning Standards.

- In grade level teacher and content area teams, teachers have agendas, common planning protocols, and team notes to support student progress. These meetings are beginning to integrate the school goals around using student data from several assessments such as mid-year Regents assessments, mock Regents, and baseline assessments data to determine student strengths and learning needs, as well as the development of strategies to support active engagement and academic achievement. For example, school leaders shared that the school is in the process of having the teacher teams use the Teaching Partnership Data Collection Tool to guide data review, observations and discussions, implications, issues, and concerns for future discussions. For example, the social studies team analyzed data from the Global History and Geography Regents, and teachers identified areas of strength and growth by individual students as well as instructional next steps. However, instructional recommendations were general and emphasized testing skills instead of specific teaching strategies to differentiate instruction based on individual needs of students, so they can deepen their understanding of the content area.

- During the observed inquiry team meeting, ELA teachers were using the critical friends protocol to analyze the student work that was used as a baseline assessment to determine students’ strengths and areas of growth as well as to discuss effective teaching strategies to address the needs of the students. The next instructional steps mentioned included “Add word web, writing prompt, and reading component to assess student annotation.” However, some next steps were general such as “Continuous use of strategies, planning of lessons, and exit tickets.” Although some of the student work was from ELLs, the team missed the opportunity to discuss teaching strategies to address the needs of this sub-group of students as indicated in the task inventory for English learners.

- Even though teams meet regularly to examine data and discuss teaching practice, the inquiry model of trying research-based strategies to move a specific group of students is inconsistent across teams. For example, teachers do not have a strategic approach to identify the students who will be part of the inquiry process. When asked, teachers shared that students were selected randomly, thus preventing schoolwide instructional coherence which would impact student outcomes for all subgroups.