Quality Review Report

2017-2018

I.S. 340
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 17K340

227 Sterling Place
Brooklyn
NY 11238

Principal: Tamara Johnson

Dates of Review:
April 18, 2018 - April 19, 2018

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

I.S. 340 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Rating</td>
</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
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</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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<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 Focus</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

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

Teaching strategies, such as providing students with access to the thinking of their peers and the use of math manipulatives provide entry points into the curriculum that allow learners to engage in conversation and produce meaningful work products.

Impact

Strategic scaffolds and extensions consistently engage students in appropriately challenging tasks. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, and sometimes, ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching strategies, particularly discussion techniques and the use of manipulatives provide students with scaffolds and promote student thinking. In a science class, the teacher shared a video with students about the formation of stars, and stopped the video several times to pose questions for students to discuss with one another about the video. This questioning and promotion of student-to-student discussion allowed students to access the thinking of their peers and deepen their understanding about the solar system, before completing their writing tasks. Similarly, in a math class, a student asked the teacher to review his work, and the teacher prompted the student to discuss their thinking with a peer rather than ask the teacher, which led two students to share their strategies and answers with one another, displaying high levels of student thinking. Across classes, teachers provide students with many opportunities to discuss content together, and to work with a partner or peer, providing scaffolds for challenging classroom tasks.

- In one math class, student use of manipulatives and math tools demonstrated more strategic use. As students worked, there were calculators and formula sheets in a bin at their desks, but students did not use them. When asked about them, a student shared that they are there for students to use if they need to, or if they are trying to prove something to a peer, but they try not to rely on them, as they cannot use them on the exam. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, students conducted a stanza analysis on a poem by Edgar Allen Poe. Students were given a graphic organizer to build annotation strategies. The organizer contained questions on the meaning behind literal phrases in the poem, and pushed students to refer back to the text and cite specific stanzas where they found information and meaning in the poem, helping students to practice higher order skills. As in many other classes, students also had accountable talk stems at their tables to promote discussions that are more rigorous and provide students with access to the discussion.

- In most classes, students worked in small groups, or with partners to complete class assignments, with opportunities and prompting to have conversations about their ideas and their work, demonstrating high levels of student thinking and participation. In an art class, students worked independently to create abstract expressionist figure drawings. The teacher provided some scaffolds, such as modeling, a timer and some verbal guidance as students worked, but students spent the majority of the period working on their own pieces. The teacher also provided a few opportunities for students to turn and talk about the choices they made in their drawings and their technique.
## Area of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations. Distributive leadership structures are developing.

**Impact**

An inquiry approach is taking shape across teacher teams. New teacher leadership roles are beginning to give teachers a voice in shaping school wide initiatives.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The observed vertical math teacher team focused on collaborative lesson planning. The three teachers met using an agenda to support a teacher planning a lesson that the others would observe as a part of a cycle of lesson study. The teacher shared that she chose the lesson topic and two aligned Common Core standards because they were standards that are to be covered post-assessment. The teachers also shared that while they have been engaged in observing one another teach and discussing the lesson afterwards, this was their first time planning a lesson together. From their work, teachers are engaged in professional collaborations centered on lesson planning, but an inquiry approach is still emerging. There is a loose connection to the school’s goals of developing additional Common Core-aligned authentic tasks that result in the improvement of rigorous instruction; however, the focus of the team was on the flow of the lesson, rather than the task in which students would engage. A review of the literacy team meeting records demonstrate that the team uses a rolling agenda and teachers review and plan for upcoming units. Agendas and minutes demonstrate that the team has made modifications to units to include authentic assessments, such as conferring with students with intentionality and efficiency. While the work of the team demonstrates development and deepening of the school’s curricula, the work does not demonstrate a cycle of inquiry to advance teacher practice and study how to improve student achievement.

- In the few months that the principal has been in place at the time of the review, new distributive leadership structures are in place. There is a new math and ELA instructional lead who work with external coaches and consultants to shape professional learning provided to teachers in the school and lead the work of curricular revisions. In the teacher team meeting, the presenting teacher shared that she is the math lead, but was reluctant to take a leadership role.

- In a separate meeting, teachers shared that there are new opportunities for teachers to have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. There is a new data team at the school, in which teachers work alongside administrators to look at assessment trends and determine schoolwide instructional next steps. In addition, a teacher leads a new team focused on schoolwide behavior. The principal has also appointed a teacher to lead the school’s work in the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI), a charge led by the previous principal. This new teacher leadership opportunity is developing to ensure that teachers have an impact student learning and programming, across the school.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders and staff ensure that the curricula align to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts emphasizing higher-order thinking skills, vocabulary, speaking and writing with text-based evidence, and problem solving in math.

Impact

Students have access to curricula that promotes college and career readiness, and the development of critical thinking skills.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricular documents across grades and subjects demonstrate alignment to the Common Core standards, as well as coherent unit planning practices across the grades and subjects. In ELA, math, science and social studies, teachers create pacing overviews that ensure alignment to the Common Core standards and prioritize standards in units across the grades. An eighth grade United States (US) History Regents unit on American nationalism includes prioritized reading, writing and speaking and listening standards, and includes essential questions that are also included as discussion and essay prompts in the unit, such as, “How does the US Constitution share our lives as Americans?” and “How reliable are the primary source documents about Nat Turner’s rebellion? Whose perspective is missing?” Similarly, a sixth grade math unit on volume and surface area also aligns to a prioritized set of standards, and includes essential questions, as well as prompts for students to explain their mathematical thinking in problem sets. This purposeful planning that aligns units to prioritized standards and integrates the instructional shifts, such as text-based answers and deep understanding were common in units shared across the grades and subjects.

- In lesson plans shared there is a focus on discussing, annotation, and writing from texts. The school uses a cross discipline literacy program to ensure vocabulary acquisition and literacy development across the subject areas, aligned with the school’s goals. Throughout the week, students take on different literacy tasks with a common set of vocabulary terms. Students are introduced to the new vocabulary in ELA, then are exposed to these words in each content area by engaging in scientific writing in science, discussing, solving, and writing about word problems in math, debating in social studies and essay writing in ELA. This shared literacy focus across the disciplines promotes consistency, college readiness, and emphasizes rigor by giving students multiple opportunities to engage with new vocabulary in discussions and writing across the content areas.

- An ELA unit shared centered on America’s Civil War, focuses on reading, writing, and speaking and listening skills, as well as interdisciplinary skills, such as interpreting historical evidence. The unit, like others shared, also includes purposeful planning to ensure that all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) engage in rigorous habits. The unit includes different texts and writing tasks to adjust the levels of rigor within assignments to support a diversity of learners, such as the use of two articles instead of three to support an oral or written argument. In math units there was also planning for varied tasks, and the use of math tools, manipulatives, and models to help support student thinking.
Additional Finding

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

Student portfolios demonstrate the use of rubrics and assessments that align to the school’s curricula. Teachers consistently check for understanding, track student thinking, and provide students opportunities for peer assessment.

Impact

Assessment practices provide students with actionable feedback and allow teachers to make effective adjustments to instruction that meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Student portfolios in classrooms across the school contained student work, including essays, tasks, and teacher-created exams that provided students with actionable feedback, usually aligned to a rubric. In a student portfolio in math, a teacher-created assessment on understanding ratio, a student received glows and grows on his work, such as praise for an explanation of what ratio means, and actionable next steps about how money is stated and where the decimal point should be situated when representing money. The written feedback provides actionable next steps for the student, and the teacher regarding student achievement. This was typical of other written feedback provided to students across the subject areas.

- In a meeting, students shared many pieces of work with clear strengths and next steps provided by the teacher. In a social studies written response to non-fiction text about slavery assignment shared by an eighth grader, the student received two out of three on a rubric that aligned to the New York State exam rubric. The student received praise for a strong introduction and thesis statement, and a next step to include additional evidence to support her ideas. The student also shared that the students received the rubric as they were working on the assignment, so that they could self-assess as they worked. In addition to the written feedback, her teacher also conferred with her about her work, and gave her the opportunity to go back and revise her work for full credit. Other students shared that this is a common practice across the school.

- Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of checks for understanding, usually through questioning, and tracking of student thinking, or on the spot adjustments to meet student learning needs. In most classes, as students worked, teachers and paraprofessionals took note of student thinking on a tracking sheet, and teachers shared that this assessment data is what teachers most commonly use to adjust future lessons, and to make changes to instructional groups. In a math lesson, the teacher listened to a group of students debating what the correct answer to a problem might be, and stopped their discussion to ask a student why he thought one student was right and another was wrong. As the students shared their thinking, the teacher took notes, and then asked, “Let’s come back to the formula. How do you find the radius?” This exchange helped students to self and peer assess, clarify their thinking, and allowed the teacher to provide students with redirection to the formula, rather than the answer, making an effective on the spot adjustment.
**Additional Finding**

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations regarding the importance of critical thinking and the use of data to all staff. School staff communicate high expectations to students through conferencing and guidance.

**Impact**

Staff are supported in their implementation of schoolwide expectations and held accountable to meeting them. Students are provided with the support and guidance needed to prepare them for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school leader consistently communicates high expectations to staff through school publications, such as the staff handbook and professional learning calendar. The calendar highlights academic expectations, such as use of the workshop model, a focus on critical thinking and literacy across the content areas, and the professional learning sessions on these topics. Other school records demonstrate that teachers receive additional support in meeting expectations, and are held accountable for meeting expectations through individualized coaching support from external coaches, in math and literacy, who provide guidance and liaise with school leaders about next steps for teachers. On Tuesdays, teachers are also provided with additional time to work together in small groups to meet expectations for lesson planning and parent outreach.

- In a meeting, teachers shared that they also have ample opportunities to participate in outside professional learning, in science, social studies, and meeting the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs through curriculum planning and the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). On Tuesdays, teachers meet in smaller professional learning groups focused on lesson planning and ensuring alignment of teaching strategies to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers shared that they often turnkey this learning with colleagues, and this sharing of information and strategies helps to create consistency across the grades and subjects.

- Teachers offer students ongoing and detailed feedback and guidance that prepare students for the next level through conferences. Several times a year, teachers meet with students about their reading levels, and share a “Student Conference Data Letter.” As they meet to discuss the student’s reading level and progress in the classroom, the teacher provides guidance so that the student uses the conference to create their own individualized reading plan. Through one-on-one conversations with teachers and staff from the community-based organization in extended learning time, students engage in similar discussions about their progress in other subjects.

- Every morning, the school leaders and guidance counselor meet with students, and provide guidance on a range of issues including academic expectations of students at the middle school, and what to expect in the next grade, or in high school. Students shared that the guidance counselor also helps students to stay informed of deadlines for taking exams and applying to high school, taking into account the size of the school, its focus, and the requirements for admission, providing students with advisement that prepares them for the next level. The school also hosts a College and Career Day where over thirty professionals visit classes to talk with students about their careers, which includes students’ help to organize the event and welcome visitors.
**Quality Indicator:** 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision  
**Rating:** Proficient

### Findings

Teachers receive effective feedback, through post-observation conferences and in writing that accurately captures strengths, challenges and provides specific next steps.

### Impact

Feedback articulates clear expectations and promotes professional growth and reflection.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders support the development of new teachers with frequent formal and informal observations, and providing feedback and next steps. At the time of the review, most teachers had been formally observed three or four times, and more often informally. Teachers shared that post-observation feedback conversations usually happen within 24 hours, and include a review of the lesson plan and student work. Teachers praised the feedback for always including something positive about their practice, and the inclusion of a clear next step, and articles that are often shared that help to promote professional growth and reflection.

- In written observations shared during the review, teacher strengths were always shared before next steps. Strengths were specific, praising teachers for effective classroom management, good lesson pacing, or using data to inform student groups, all feedback that aligns with the school leader’s belief about use of the workshop model to structure a lesson. Teachers shared that they appreciate that the ratings within the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* are always accompanied by an explanation of classroom practices that were observed that support the rating, helping them to be reflective about what works and next steps. As one teacher shared, “There are times when I thought I didn’t do something, and they showed me where I did. That really helps. It makes you feel valued.”

- Next steps for teachers are prioritized, actionable, and specific. Examples of next steps for teachers include straightforward phrases, such as, “write questions on index cards for student group discussions”; “invite students to respond and ask questions using turn and talks,” or “circulate during the lesson to collect data.” These next steps align with the school leader’s expectations for teachers to release control to allow learners to grapple with materials and concepts, and to assess continuously during the lesson, in line with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. 