Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Spring Creek Community School
Secondary School 19K422
1065 Elton Street
Brooklyn
NY 11208

Principal: Christina Koza

Dates of Review:
February 7, 2018 - February 8, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Spring Creek Community School serves students in grade 6 through grade 11. 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>
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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>Area of Focus</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>Well Developed</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
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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>
<td>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings
School leaders consistently partner with parents and communicate expectations for professionalism, instruction, and college and career readiness through Spring Creek Community School (SCCS) handbooks and newsletters.

Impact
There is a culture of mutual accountability in which school leaders, teachers, and parents work together as partners to support students in making progress toward high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal communicates expectations to the entire faculty through the SCCS Faculty Handbook, the Special Education Handbook, and meetings with staff. A consistent message is that for students to become critical and compassionate thinkers, "every child at this school must be seen, known and heard." In the Faculty Handbook, the principal reminds teachers that teaching is both a responsibility and a privilege, adding, "it is part of our jobs to hold ourselves, and each other, accountable for this responsibility." This handbook outlines expectations for professional goal setting as part of the supervision process based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In one observation report, a school leader noted that the teacher should explore differentiation approaches and recommended a text to consult with specific strategies for reaching male students.

- School leaders expect the vast majority of teachers to engage in co-teaching models of instruction. The SCCS Special Education Handbook explains how students with disabilities must be provided with access to rigorous curricula in the least restrictive environment. School leaders require teachers to engage in co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing practices and hold them accountable for doing so. Most observation reports comment on the manner in which teachers are providing these models of instruction. At one professional development meeting with the teachers, the principal outlined expectations for developing habits of communication to, and about, students as an indication of how adults treat them. Teachers were asked to consider the everyday equity implications in their communications with students, and each other, by asking, “Does this communication help support equity (the full human talent development of every student, and all groups of students)?”

- Parents receive information about school policies and academic goals for their children from the SCCS Parent/Guardian Handbook. This handbook advises families about the support they can expect from the teachers and staff. The parents and students receive detailed information about the requirements to stay on a successful path to graduation. The syllabus for an eighth-grade science course identifies the importance of the home-school connection. In a letter to parents, the teacher writes, “I am confident that, with you as my partner, your child will be able to reach the goals set for them this year.”

- Parents indicated that they track the academic progress their children make, as well as their attendance and behavior, using PupilPath and through regular progress reports. Parents receive the monthly, Creek News, which includes information about what students are studying in each grade. A recent edition provides information on how to interpret the scores from the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test and provides resources for parents on the college application process. Almost half of the students who attend the middle school stay to attend the high school. Of former eighth graders at this school, 88 percent earn enough credits to be on track for graduation in grade nine.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy
Rating: Proficient

Findings

Teaching strategies in most classes consistently provide multiple entry points emphasizing critical thinking and exploration, however, there are not always extensions provided for high achieving students. Students engage in the creation of rigorous work products and discussions.

Impact

All learners, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, engage in challenging tasks requiring higher-order thinking. Work products reflect high levels of thinking and participation, but not always ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In a math lesson, the teacher posted questions on the board that encouraged students to demonstrate their thinking clearly so that the “teacher [can] understand what I was thinking by looking at my work.” The students were required to annotate the word problems to highlight the important information needed to find the correct solution. Students were provided with worksheets, some with scaffolds to remind students how to set up a double number line, and others with extension activities. In a science class, one group of students answered a series of questions about the molar mass of compounds in a scavenger hunt format while another group compared two types of Oreo cookies, one with double the amount of creme filling as the other. Students with disabilities were supported by a co-teacher who facilitated the station activities.

- Some students, but not all, demonstrate ownership of their learning in work products and discussions as some teachers release them to explore the learning on their own. For example, in a science lesson on the circulatory system, after giving directions, groups of students constructed life-sized tracings of the human body and placed images of organs and connected straws to represent the circulatory system. The teacher supported discussion by reminding students how to pronounce words such as atria and ventricle. A student in one group suggested to the rest of his group that they mark the right and left side on the drawing, so they would remember that the right and left side of the body in the tracing was reversed from their own. This level of independence was not seen in some classes with more teacher-controlled and less student-initiated discussion.

- High levels of thinking were demonstrated in work products, although not all assignments gave students the chance to take ownership of their learning. Directions for a science lab outlined all of the steps and identified the liquids to use in a science experiment. For this experiment, a student hypothesized what would happen to a gummi bear immersed in Coca-Cola overnight, “it would dissolve really fast and fizz.” Analyzing the results of the experiment, the student noted that her hypothesis was incorrect because the gummi bear did not dissolve and concluded, “the gummi bear maintained homeostasis with the solution”, similar to a cell. In an essay on The Catcher in the Rye, a student supported a claim that the author is cynical by explaining that the headmaster of the protagonist’s school, Mr. Haas, “doesn’t like parents and he puts on this ‘nice guy act’ because he wants their money.”
School leaders ensure curricula align to Common Core Learning Standards or content standards and incorporate a consistent emphasis on academic vocabulary and fluency in math. Academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits and skills.

Impact
Curricula across grades and content areas coherently promote college and career readiness skills. Curricula are accessible for a variety of learning styles.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal meets regularly with grade and department leaders to review unit plans to identify emerging needs of students and adjust the curricula. Coaches work with teachers to ensure coherence and alignment of lesson activities and assessments with content standards. There is a consistent focus on vocabulary development and math fluency. A science lesson plan for an Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) class on chemical reactions, moles, and stoichiometry incorporates high levels of vocabulary as well as requires students to use formulas and calculating skills. In a section of the plan entitled, “Words Worth Knowing,” the teachers have listed words such as *molar mass*, *coefficients*, and *subscripts*. Other lesson plans include the same focus on the development of academic language, such as an English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plan for an ICT class with learning objectives related to the Common Core standard related to determining the meaning of words and phrases.

- A teacher planned the success criteria for a lesson to include statements beginning with “I Can,” for example, “I can recognize and create equivalent ratio.$^1$ The learning objectives and activities align with the standard dealing with the ratio relationship between two quantities. The lesson plan includes several worksheets, some with scaffolds, such as the inclusion of number lines, and others with extension activities for high achieving students. An ELA lesson plan on bioethical issues of stem cell research planned activities for students who “work best with concrete straightforward subject matter” as well as those “who work best when given the opportunity to do abstract thinking.”

- Teachers incorporate levels of complexity that require students to “apply skills in given tasks.” A task for a sixth-grade writing unit on the qualities of a hero requires students to identify a character from *A Wrinkle in Time* that they consider to be a hero and to support their claim with details about a heroic journey from the text. A lesson plan in a social studies class addresses the essential question, “Is world peace possible?” The plan identifies non-fiction texts at three different Lexile levels and tasks students to use two sources to discuss the topic of nuclear proliferation.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
All teachers use assessments and rubrics that align with the curricula and provide teachers with a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers use baseline and formative assessments to monitor the progress students are making toward goals across grades to make adjustments to instruction.

Impact
Teachers provide all students with actionable and meaningful feedback on their achievement and students are demonstrating increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence
- Teachers create and use task-specific rubrics as well as scoring rubrics aligned with the Regents exams. A rubric for a math task on graphing circles outlined criteria for receiving zero to four points for solutions to problems. A zero-point response is “irrelevant or incoherent” and a four-point response explains how the correct solution was reached. On one piece of student work, the teacher indicated that the student had received four points, and commended the student for using a graph to explain his thinking, even though it was not required by the task. For an essay on Supreme Court cases, the teacher gave the student five points, the highest score, for facts, examples, and details, and commended the student for writing that “was clear, full of rich details and hit on all points of the task.” The teacher gave the student four points for analysis and suggested that the student could write more about how life in America changed after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896. Teachers in each department create grading policies that reflect the priorities of each content area. The math department includes performance tasks with exams and quizzes. The ELA department includes projects with other assessments.

- Feedback includes suggestions for improvement that are aligned with the rubrics and address strengths and areas for improvement. Comments on a grade-eight two-point short response on the topic of immigration in the United States informed the author that “some elements of the second paragraph are a bit too much in the vein of conjecture,” and added that the student had done a good job integrating research. A teacher awarded a student full credit using a three-point holistic rubric for a math assignment and commented that she had “an excellent understanding of reflection and transformation.” One student stated that comments help him improve his work and noted that as a result of the feedback he received from his teachers, he is “more specific about the source of information” when he writes.

- Teachers use common assessments to gather data on student performance in all content areas and use the analysis of performance data to make programmatic changes and adjustments. The eighth-grade humanities teachers normed protocols for providing feedback to students on short- and extended-responses based on the analysis of results from baseline assessments. The results of subsequent formative assessments show that 74 percent of eighth graders are meeting standards on the written short responses and teachers have noted a 25-percentage point increase in the number of students meeting standards on extended responses.

- Teachers receive student performance information every month in *The Spring Creek Data Diver*, which summarizes progress reports, periodic assessments, and scholarship reports on the number of students who passed core courses by grade and subject. Teachers use the raw data included in the Data Diver to inform their inquiry work. An issue from November 2017 included action items that asked teachers to consider “How are we planning to get students who are currently failing classes back on track?” Teachers use assessment results to determine which students should attend after-school and Saturday intervention programs.
## Findings

Observations of teacher practices accurately capture strengths and challenges and offer suggestions for improvement. School leaders and teachers manage professional development and strategically plan for the teaching needs of the school as it expands to grade twelve.

## Impact

School leaders encourage teachers to be reflective and to grow professionally toward their goals and realize improved student outcomes.

## Supporting Evidence

- **Teachers receive feedback that accurately reflects the strengths and next steps for their professional growth determined by school leaders.** Teachers agreed that school leaders reference their growth toward personal goals, established at the beginning of the year in the initial planning conferences, in subsequent professional conversations. Incorporating suggestions for improvement from school leaders, a teacher revised a thematic unit on gender studies to incorporate an argumentative essay using a Regents writing rubric. On a mid-year self-assessment, he reflected that he was proud of the growth his students showed in argumentative and analytical writing.

- **One teacher stated that it is helpful to have the principal's feedback on overall instructional practices while also getting the assistant principal's perspective on individual lessons.** One observation report commended a teacher for working closely with a co-teacher to “effectively model reading and analysis strategies” before releasing the students to interact with the text. Another teacher was praised for thoughtfully grouping students “to support them in meeting the day’s objectives.” The feedback suggested that the teacher develop tools to track skill acquisition and capture anecdotal information “as you facilitate learning from lesson to lesson.” In addition to feedback on instructional practices, school leaders recommend resources to help teacher growth and development. For example, one observation report suggested that the teacher visit a colleague who “has done some good work with fishbowls” and noted that many of the students in the class had participated in fishbowl activities in a prior year. One school leader noted that a teacher had implemented prior feedback about encouraging students to engage in tasks independently and rated the teacher effective in engaging students in learning.

- **One teacher explained that having potential teaching candidates fulfill their student teaching requirements at the school gives school leaders the opportunity to assess their skills and also to see how well they will fit in with the culture of the school.** Professional learning opportunities are developed to address the goals and address the common focus areas, including restorative justice practices, increasing student ownership and independence, and effective use of data to impact student achievement. School leaders and staff focus on identifying and recruiting new teachers to meet the growing enrollment of the school. The school leader strategically increased the assignment of teachers in co-teaching classrooms and, with teacher input, re-programmed to increase elective and advisory periods. As a result, more students are earning credits toward graduation. In the eleventh grade, 35 percent of students had an increase in the number of courses passed after the first marking period.
**Additional Finding**

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

**Findings**

All teachers engage in professional collaborations, including those associated with the Showcase Schools program that are structured, inquiry-based, and embed opportunities for leadership development.

**Impact**

Teachers improve their pedagogical skills and groups of students make progress toward mastery of goals. Teachers play an integral role in decisions that affect students in all grade levels.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Literature for a visit as part of the City Showcase Schools program describes the school’s belief that inquiry and collaboration are central to good teaching and learning and that teachers “need time, space, resources, and support to effectively engage in these practices.” All teachers engage in collaborative work that is structured as part of their program and they have multiple co-teaching planning periods each week. Weekly meetings of grade and department leaders ensure coherence in planning for professional development across the school.

- Teachers participate in grade teams to discuss the academic performance of students they share and to develop gradewide instructional practices, for example, the use of annotation strategies in all content areas. They also participate in department teams to plan curricula that are coherent from grade to grade and span middle school to high school. Inquiry teams focus on analyzing qualitative and quantitative data for students’ academic and personal growth and development. One team was observed using a protocol to analyze data on the Lexile levels for students from all grades. Teachers worked online to add their comments to a shared document. One teacher noticed that students performing at a lower level had improved, while the performance of students who started at a higher Lexile level was stagnant. The members of the team determined that they would focus on strengthening annotation strategies and developing research skills as students progress from grade to grade.

- Academic performance is increasing for students across the school. In 2015, 48 percent of sixth-graders were performing at Level 2 or higher in ELA, which improved to 64 percent by the time these students were in eighth grade in 2017. The performance for these students on math showed even greater gains, with four percent of students at Level 3 or 4 in 2015 and 13 percent at these levels in 2017, and a decrease in the percentage of students with disabilities performing at Level 1 from 92 percent to 75 percent.

- Grade leaders and department leaders join the principal’s weekly cabinet meeting to develop leadership skills, discuss the needs of teachers, and participate in key decisions and schoolwide initiatives about student learning. Teachers in each grade contribute to decisions that impact their students. For example, the tenth-grade teachers decided to divide their students into advisory classes and sixth-grade teachers decided to hold monthly town hall meetings for their grade. Grade nine teachers held a retreat to integrate incoming students with students who were continuing from the middle school. Teachers explained that they take on many leadership responsibilities that include grade, department, and new teacher liaison roles. A new teacher stated that meeting with other new teachers has helped in exploring strategies for grouping students. A member of a teacher team asserted that learning to teach without the support of experienced teacher leaders would be a challenge because “every day is a new course.”