Quality Review Report

2017-2018

James Madison High School
High school 22K425
3787 Bedford Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11229

Principal: Jodie Cohen

Dates of Review:
November 14, 2017 - November 15, 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


School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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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<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Rating</td>
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<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>Developing</td>
<td></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>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the schools instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
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Findings

School leaders and staff systematically communicate high expectations for college and career readiness and provide effective support to all students, and they successfully partner with families providing them with guidance relative to their children’s progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact

Partnerships with teachers and guidance counselors ensure that families understand the progress of and can support their children to become ready for college and/or career opportunities. Guidance and advisement encourage all students, including high need subgroups, to take ownership for their learning and prepare them for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents praised communication as a great strength of the school, especially the teachers’ use of an online grading system that helps parents and students track student progress on assessments and credit accumulation. Parents shared that the online system and ongoing access to teachers and the student’s assigned guidance counselor helps parents to learn about expectations, and to build a partnership between parents and school staff. As a parent shared, “When my son was transferred in, the guidance counselor reached out to me immediately and invited me in for a meeting and to meet his teachers. He had a plan for him for the next three years. It was amazing.” These meetings with incoming parents, and the assignment of a guidance counselor to see every student successfully through graduation is typical at the school.

- For students in high-need subgroups, such as students with disabilities and students who are behind academically, purposeful matching of students to counselors and other supports are provided, including a mandatory Bridge to Life transition planning course. As a parent shared, “They are especially concerned about planning for success, and college selection for students with disabilities and student athletes.” Other parents shared stories of tailored supports from mentors and coaches, to them and their children to ensure purposeful decisions about college selections and life after high school.

- Assigned guidance counselors meet individually with students six times a year to offer ongoing and detailed guidance that is tailored to the individual student. School records show similar tailored supports for parents, including agendas and sign in sheets for events such as college guidance and financial aid workshops, and one-on-one meetings for parents with guidance counselors and the school’s parent coordinator. This is to tailor supports for families and help them understand the complexities of selecting and getting their children into college. For seniors, classroom teachers also provide additional guidance and support for college applications and essays every other week.

- Through the school’s 44 clubs and teams, students get exposure to a great number of subjects and experiences outside of what is offered during the school day curricula. Many of these opportunities are created to help students explore future college majors or career interests, such as mock trial, technology club, robotics, and softball. The school also offers 15 advanced placement courses, and electives offered at Kingsborough Community College, so that students can enter college prepared for college-level coursework and credits. Impact from these programs is evident in the data from the 2016-2017 school year that shows a four-year graduation rate at 83 percent, above the City average. The College and Career Preparatory Course Index, Four Year College Readiness Index, and Postsecondary Enrollment Rates are also above the City average.
Area of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings
Teachers are beginning to use common assessments. Some teachers use both ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact
Adjustments to curricula and instruction are not consistently made in order to meet the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across subjects and grades, teachers use common assessments in different ways to track student progress and make adjustments. In Geometry and math, teachers use an online program to measure student strengths and gaps in knowledge, and then students receive individualized online instruction to meet their learning needs; the math units are sometimes adjusted to reflect the adding in of the online lessons. Teachers and administrators shared that across the subject areas, teacher teams meet on Fridays to make adjustments to the curricula; however, teachers do not take any notes during these meetings, making it unclear how they make adjustments to curricula and instruction. In January and June, department assistant principals and teachers adjust the curricula to reflect teacher recommendations, or write curricula for new classes. It is not clear from school records if these revisions are connected to analysis of common assessments. At a teacher question and answer session, a few teachers shared that they review common assessment results with students, and ask students to develop their own next steps.

- In English and social studies courses across the grades, common assessment practices are more aligned than in other departments. Teachers unpacked the standards and skills in the Regents exams, and created frameworks of skills that students must master at every grade level and within each course. These frameworks are used as a basis for the common assessments that teachers in these subject areas give; however, it is unclear from a review of school documents how teachers then use student results from these assessments to make further adjustments to curricula and instruction. During an observation of an English teacher team, teachers brought analyses of their students work, and in a discussion with colleagues shared how they were individually making adjustments to instruction. However, it was unclear from their sharing of strategies whether each of the teachers present would incorporate any of the ideas for making adjustments into their own units. Thus, these practices demonstrate a lack of coherence in how teachers use common assessments to make adjustments to meet student learning needs.

- In many of the classes visited, teachers did some checks for understanding during the lesson, usually through questioning, as was observed in a math class, where the teacher looked over student work at a table and asked, “Did you base your answers on the table?” In this class, as in many others, the teachers did not take notes on student thinking as they circulated the room, making it unclear how they would use these noticings of student thinking to make adjustments. In two classes, the teachers also used questioning to check for understanding, and took notes on student thinking as they conferred with students. Yet, this tracking to make adjustments to meet student-learning needs was not evident across classrooms.
Findings
School leaders and teachers ensure that the curricula are aligned to the Common Core and consistently focus on students’ ability to use evidence to support an argument or explain their thinking in writing. The curricula include rigorous tasks and emphasize higher-order skills across grades.

Impact
The curricula promote college and career readiness and are accessible to all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the grades and subjects, units and lessons focus on student use of evidence from the text in English, social studies and science, often in project-based tasks. For example, the task in a lesson plan for a tenth-grade law class, required students to cite evidence from various sources to create a public service announcement. Similarly, a senior-level English lesson plan, called for citing evidence from the text to demonstrate an understanding of human nature and character development in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. Tasks such as these that required students to cite evidence from texts were common across the grades and subjects.

- In math, tasks focus not just on solving math problems, but also on students’ ability to use information from the question or the problem to explain their math thinking. For example, a ninth-grade geometry lesson plan, tasked students with developing proofs in geometric rigid motions, demonstrating what they knew through the proofs, as well as written and verbal explanations of their work. Similarly, a ninth grade math lesson plan for an Algebra 1 class required students to think deeply about their own math reasoning and defend their choices in demonstrating starting volume and the rate of change in a graph. In both instances, the lesson plans closely connected to one or two Common Core standards, and focused on students’ ability to explain their thinking.

- Across grades and subjects, curricula consistency emphasized rigorous habits and higher order skills, as was observed in a “Fun with Math” unit for students who are enrolled in a one year Algebra 1 course who also received a Level 1 or 2 on the eighth grade New York State math exam. The unit prioritizes some standards over others as “major” standards to be reviewed with students, such as performing arithmetic operations on polynomials and solving equations and inequalities in one variable. The unit also calls for a balance of skills work, (two days a week), a focus on problem solving, and open-note quizzes to “encourage students to keep track of and work off their notes.” The unit also emphasizes vocabulary and note-taking strategies to ensure that students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) have access to the curricula.

- Similarly, a review of social studies units demonstrates a mix of tasks ranging from that which requires students to develop note-taking skills and cite evidence from text in essays. For example, an Advanced Placement (AP) Government unit asks students to write from primary source documents, respond to current events and develop sound arguments. In a science unit on reproduction and development, in the Living Environment curriculum, the unit prioritized three content standards, focusing the scope of the unit. The unit also includes options such as guest speakers and the use of models of mitosis and meiosis and videos of the male and female reproductive system, for representing the material to all learners, including students with disabilities and ELLs. This planning, typical of other units observed, ensures that students consistently have access to rigorous curricula.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Developing |

Findings

Some observed classroom instruction reflects the belief that students learn best through a student-centered approach where the teacher serves as the facilitator, but it is not yet evident in the majority of pedagogical practices. Not all student writing and discussion reflect high levels of rigor.

Impact

Teaching practices inconsistently lead to high levels of student engagement in rigorous work products and discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty share the belief that students learn best when teachers serve as facilitators and create student-centered classrooms where students drive classroom discussions. This belief was present in about half of the classes observed, but in the other half, teacher-led or teacher-dominated instruction persisted. For example, in a Global History class, students engaged in partnered project-based work, where students debated whether laisse faire is a reasonable economic system and calculated capital gains in simulated business plans. The teacher served as a facilitator, conferencing in with students to check for understanding and providing guidance to pairs, while the majority of students engaged in partnered work, without the need for teacher interruption. In other classes, such as an algebra class, students sat together in groups or pairs, but teacher-led discussion and teacher-to-student questioning dominated the period, leaving students with little worktime.

- In one student-centered class, teaching practices led to high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership by all learners. Students in a twelfth grade elective English class acted out Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, taking ownership of characters and stage direction, with the teacher stopping the class only to facilitate discussions of the content or action and to help clarify student thinking. While this ownership was not typical across the majority of classrooms, there were other classes, such as English as a New Language, where teachers attempted to engage in a whole class discussion, but teacher questioning dominated the discussion, rather than authentic student-to-student discussion.

- In some classes, students sat in partnerships, groups, or rows, and worked independently with mixed levels of student thinking and participation evident in student work and discussions. In an Internet Technology class, students worked independently on a project with image manipulation software to create an artistic rendering of themselves, with guidance from an online task sheet and guidance from the teacher and peers. While students worked independently, all students were engaged, and students stopped to provide one another with guidance and feedback as they edited their images. The students’ work took center-stage, and the teacher facilitated by redirecting students to different ways to manipulate the software, and the task sheet provided encouraged students to discuss their thinking with their peers. In other classes, tasks were not as clearly laid out for students, creating more need for the teacher to clarify or provide guidance, thus extending the teaching portion of the lesson leaving little time for student work and uneven levels of student thinking and participation.
**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders support the development of teachers with feedback and next steps from frequent cycles of observation. Feedback to teachers inconsistently captures strengths, challenges, and next steps, nor does it include the analysis of student work or data, and is not yet fully connected to the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

**Impact**

Feedback to teachers is beginning to support teacher development, elevate school-wide instructional practices, and consistently promote professional growth and reflection.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders have created frequent cycles of observation, effected primarily by department assistant principals and the principal. However, as there are many administrators who observe teaching practices, there is a lack of commonality in feedback practices across grades and subjects. For example, some observation records noted teaching practices rated effective or highly effective aligned with Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, but included little or no supporting evidence to support those ratings.

- The inclusion of an analysis of student work or data was not present in any of the observation records reviewed at the time of the review. The school leaders shared that it is not yet a common practice across departments to include the analysis of student work or data in the observation cycle. At a question and answer session with teachers, teachers also shared that sometimes they will bring student work from a lesson with them to discuss along with their feedback, but usually only at a teacher’s request.

- In the reviewed written feedback to teachers there was some misalignment, particularly in questioning and discussion techniques, where teachers were rated highly effective, yet the supporting evidence aligned to an effective rating. For example, an observation rated highly effective discussed the teacher’s use of questioning, rather than the students’ development of questions for their peers, a hallmark of the highly effective rating. While this misalignment was present in several observations, others were more closely aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, demonstrating inconsistencies across departments.

- Written feedback to teachers often articulated next steps, some with more clarity than others. Feedback around the use of assessment to drive instruction was common across observations, and in some reports, next steps were specific with recommendations to visit colleagues who can provide support in acquiring new strategies, such as discussion techniques. For example, in one observation report, a teacher’s next step was to expand the discussion from teacher-to-student, to student-to-student. The teacher was prompted to visit a colleague’s class to observe her questioning and discussion technique. In other reports, next steps were vague, or there were many suggestions, making it unclear about which next step to take to elevate instructional practices.
Findings

Teachers engage in professional collaborations, some of them informal, and they are beginning to focus on the implementation of the Common Core standards. During these collaborations, teachers analyze the progress of targeted students.

Impact

Collaborations are beginning to result in improved teacher practice and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- From the social studies teacher team meeting observed, and from what other teachers shared at question and answer sessions, teacher team meetings are a time for professional collaborations where teachers share their ideas for improving instructional practices. Teachers independently analyze data from their own classes, determine their own next steps, and meet with colleagues to share what they are doing to meet students’ needs. The focus of the meeting observed was not on analyzing student work or data, but on sharing instructional strategies. This work demonstrates strong professional collaboration, not an inquiry approach.

- While a few teams in the building have taken on a more structured inquiry approach, identifying issues and choosing strategies to focus on, and engaging in a process of working through a six to eight week cycle of reviewing student or teacher work connected to a standard or strategy was not observed. While the school has a new partnership with a professional coach to grow its understanding of the inquiry process, at the time of the review it was not yet in place consistently across teams.

- In the teacher team meeting observed, teachers opened the meeting by noting student performance on a recent baseline assessment, and differences in how teachers presented the assessment which included online or paper, with and without scaffolds. Teachers opened the meeting with a discussion of class-level student data, and a discussion of one student, but did not analyze any student work at the meeting. Teachers shared what they noticed from their classroom practice, but did not connect their noticings to student work products. Teachers individually shared, “what the data shows,” and “next steps for interventions.” This work does not yet result in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students.

- During the observed teacher team meeting one social studies teacher shared, “I used to never use the words, ‘audience’ and ‘claim’. It wasn’t a part of my teaching vocabulary. This is the first year that I am doing this.” Teachers also shared that while reviewing assessment results was sometimes the team’s work, at other times, teachers focused on developing enduring understandings in units, or sharing what they have learned from outside professional learning about the upcoming changes to the Global Regents exam. While teacher teams are deepening their understanding of the Common Core, and changes in New York State assessment practices, ongoing analysis of data and student work does not typically result in progress toward goals for groups of students.