Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Olympus Academy
High school 18K635
755 East 100 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11236

Principal: Bruce Gonzales

Dates of Review:
May 8, 2018 - May 9, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Marion Wilson
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

Olympus Academy serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>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>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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## School Culture

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

1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults

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

3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations

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

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

4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning

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

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
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Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support are informed by a theory of action for the school’s culture. There are structures in place such as restorative justice, advisory circles, and adult accountability partners for each student in the school.

Impact

All students have a staff member that helps to make home visits, personalize their credit accumulation, and coordinates activities that result in their being motivated, engaged, and organized for effort in school. As a result of an atmosphere focused on the whole student, the school environment is safe and meaningfully involves student voice in most important decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders articulated that they believe students should feel empowered as members of the school’s daily operations so they will have a stake in making the school and their own lives better, resulting in less incidents and disciplinary infractions. All staff members receive training in restorative circle practices, which have significantly influenced the reduction in suspension rates. Students also spoke about restorative circle training and the school’s Community Building Day that enabled them to bond in a congenial atmosphere, learn more about each other’s background, cultural heritage, and resulted in less tension between cultural groups. During the large-group student meeting, the student shared that she and her peers have a meaningful voice and are free to express ideas and suggestions to benefit and improve the school community. For example, the school’s valedictorian and other student leaders confirmed that their suggestion was accepted and the school had their first Community Building Day earlier in the year.

- The school personalizes each students’ program to ensure that they have the necessary credits they need. School leaders shared that they visit the homes of all students at least once per semester, which helps to build rapport with families. They shared that even though they sometimes do not like the surprise visits, they know it is done out of love and concern for their well-being. Attendance has drastically improved for chronically late and long-term absence with the implementation of an asynchronous learning environment, which help students with other familial responsibilities to continue to take courses. As a result, each student has an accountability adult partner who makes sure that all of their social, personal, emotional, and academic needs are satisfied. One student shared during the large group meeting, “All the adults care about me and want me to be successful. They do not think I am a loser because I attend a transfer school. All of my teachers have done everything in their power to save my life so I can be successful.” All other students nodded in agreement.

- The school encourages student voice and leadership and, as a result, empower students to contribute to important aspects of the school’s culture. There is mutual respect between teachers and student and results in a calm and conducive learning environment with minimal incidents. During the large-group student meeting, one student shared, “This school wants to hear my voice. Even though I am not on student council, I can freely share my thoughts.” All other students expressed agreement on how they are able to demonstrate leadership, take the lead in planning school-wide cultural events, and contribute ideas to important conversations and programming at the school. Student leaders suggested moving some classes to later in the day to help students who worked late or who had childcare concerns be able to come to school for a full day and now core courses are offered later in the school day.
Area of Focus

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

Findings
Teaching strategies in some classrooms inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. In some classrooms, some students are unable to produce meaningful work products.

Impact
As a result, there is uneven engagement in some classes, which can limit the work of some English Language Learners and students with disabilities to engage in challenging tasks and activities. While some activities encouraged a few student-to-student discussions, most visits included teacher-centered lessons.

Supporting Evidence

- In a history class, students worked on laptops to complete a tool, which required them to complete how their life would be different if there were no *Bill of Rights*. The first column was the right, the students had to explain the premise behind each right, and how they benefit from this right, and then describe a real-life situation where the right was supported or violated. Students worked independently on their tasks and had an opportunity to turn and talk to a partner to complete the activity. While students were able to complete this task and understand the expectations for performance, there was a missed opportunity for student ownership and an extension activity for students performing above standards and they shared that the activity did not offer a challenge for them.

- Some teaching strategies include various instructional models including a blended learning individual support model for students to work independently or in a small group based upon mastering a skill, completing a task, or understanding content. In a science class, students were required to explain how genetic engineering occurs, describe the process of in-vitro fertilization, and answer the essential question, “How can genetic engineering impact our quality of life?” The lesson was teacher-centered as the teacher both asked and answered most questions and did not provide opportunities for students to grapple with the complex topics. However, in an English Language Arts lesson, students worked in small ability-leveled groups to chart test sophistication tips for their classmates. In one group, students discussed their notes, and charted important reminders for their peers to remember including how to write a synthesis essay. Student-generated responses included information on the difference between analysis and synthesis; a strategy for answering the prompt; and how to structure their time to maximize their efforts. Each group had defined roles and after presenting, provided warm feedback to each other on the quality of their presentations.

- Affixed to students’ desks were accountable talk and meta-cognitive prompt steps to help students express their understanding of complex material. In a Socratic seminar class, the objective was to use accountable talk stems to build on each other’s ideas and cite evidence about the central idea from the text. There was a missed opportunity for students to use the stems to ask each other questions, the discussion was primarily between teacher and select students. In a history class, students were required to complete document-based questions related to the French revolution and provided a chart with dates, ruling governments, and the major changes during each time period. Questions on the activity sheet were, “From Robespierre’s perspective, what was one threat the government of France faced in 1793?” and “According to John Laurence Carr, what was one change Robespierre persuaded the government to make to address the threat to the revolution?” Most students wrote one sentence to answer questions and did not cite evidence from the text to support their thinking. However, in another history class, students analyzed political cartoons based on the *Great Depression* and engaged in discussion with their partner. Some teaching strategies do not regularly afford students opportunities to make their thinking visible.
Findings

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize higher-order thinking skills across most grades and subjects for a diversity of learners. Tasks are planned and refined using student work from quizzes, performance tasks, writing samples, and mock Regents exams.

Impact

Curricula and academic tasks are accessible for English Language Learners and students with disabilities with opportunities for students to have multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. Challenging tasks are modified to include supports for vocabulary, checklists, notes, and tips to help a diversity of learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Planning for asynchronous learning encompasses the pre-requisite skills students will need to complete tasks remotely. For example, in a history task, there was a pre-defined glossary of terms, related websites for resources, tiered questions, and annotated notes and hints. A math workshop activity sheet on graphing systems of equations included definitions and samples, suggestions on how to write and graph equations, important vocabulary terms, and examples of intersecting lines, parallel lines, and coinciding lines. In addition, the standards for math practices were also included on the activity sheet as a reminder for students to use one of the strategies to help them solve word problems. Planning templates reviewed during the visit included a special education department planning template, which is a detailed action plan to assist with delivering instruction to each student based on their needs and strengths. As a result, most curricula and academic tasks include supports for learning with targeted grouping, intervention, and differentiation to support students.

- Teachers and staff conducted a rigor audit of curricular documents and academic tasks to make sure that they were all Common Core-aligned, appropriately scaffolded to be inclusive of most learners, and provided questions that promote active student engagement. Teachers used this tool alongside the Regents’ pass rates data, results of benchmark exams, and other assessments to revise academic tasks based on past and current student performance. For example, because of students’ limited responses to constructed response questions, curricular units were revised to incorporate more of a Humanities approach focused on building students’ vocabulary, encouraging students to cite evidence to support their thinking, and making their thinking visible in their writing. Another sample review included an activity sheet that was created after teachers noted that students did not have sufficient information to capture notes from conversations. Teachers then created a graphic organizer for students to respond to questions and in the model, cite evidence to quote their discussion, their partners, and the theme of what they read.

- Teachers use the results from pre-assessments to plan units of study in order to provide the necessary graphic organizers, use of manipulatives, front-loaded vocabulary, and annotated notes to tasks to help students access content. Most teachers are using a backwards planning approach by designing the assessment, administering the assessment, and then plan activities and tasks that support what students are able to do and gaps in their understanding. Academic tasks allow students to create PowerPoints, use Cornell notetaking templates, conduct research, and make visual displays to demonstrate their understanding. In a reading task, students had to identify examples of conflict and characterization, cite evidence for the central idea, draw conclusions about the author’s message, and prove and compare the points of view in different stories. Most tasks provide built-in supports to help students complete challenging activities.
**Additional Finding**

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

Most teachers use or create assessments aligned to the school’s grading policy and the Common Core. Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across most grades and subject areas.

**Impact**

Students receive both written and verbal feedback aligned to rubrics on their work products. The results from Regents exams, performance tasks, and teacher-created assessment tools are used to adjust units of study, pacing calendars, and teaching strategies.

**Supporting Evidence**

- During the small-group student meeting, most students presented a formative assessment checklist that was aligned to the skills assessed that was written in student-friendly language. Students shared that teachers used this tool to provide them with actionable next steps on how to improve their work to get a better grade. One student shared that the teacher suggested that the student clearly state the value of other variables, rewrite the equation to include the slope, graph, and properly label the equation, and state a solution for the system of equations. Most students feel that the checklist or rubric provided for tasks helps them understand what is required to meet the expectations of the skill or standard the task is focused on. For example, feedback included on a scoring rubric for an open-response question stated, “Be sure to answer all parts of the questions related to ecosystems to let your reader know that you have an understanding of primary succession.” Most students receive feedback from most teachers that is written in student-friendly language.

- Teachers in the Humanities department developed an in-house tool called a checkric, which is used to provide feedback to students on their work and serves as a conferencing log for students and teachers. Both teachers and students shared that the checkric enables teachers to provide them with actionable feedback in relation to the standards on how to improve or redo their work. Other rubrics reviewed as evidence included clearly outlined levels of student performance that demonstrated student understanding of how to complete the task. In a text analysis practice sheet, the teacher wrote the following, “Link every piece of evidence to the conflict and go deeper into the conflict. Please watch your grammar and your use of tenses to strengthen your conclusion.” Most students shared that feedback or grades on quizzes, texts, or assignments let them know how to improve their work, their strengths, and areas of growth.

- Teachers use subject area and skill-based pre-assessments to gauge student knowledge. There are also online assessments that help teachers provide actionable feedback to students with regard to the standards of expectations for quality work. The results from these tools are used to provide interventions such as tutoring, targeted small-group instruction, peer tutoring, and providing additional student-facing materials to help students better understand the content. The math department team noticed that on a recent math performance task, several students struggled on graphing linear inequalities and were having trouble explaining their thinking. Teachers then created a tip sheet for students that included notes on how they should use symbols in order to know where to shade. The task sheet included, “Open circles do not include that number for, ‘less than’ symbols, and closed circles do not include the number for ‘greater than’ or ‘equal to’.” Most teachers use a variety of data to determine student proficiency and adjust curricular tools to support students.
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 teachers’ professionalism and instructional practices via face-to-face meetings, emails, and the faculty handbook to the entire staff. Teachers communicate with parents on a regular basis through home visits, emails, text messages, and phone calls connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

Administrators provide training and have a system of accountability for helping teacher meet and achieve expectations. Families have a working understanding of student progress toward Common Core-aligned expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Both school leaders and teachers shared the work of the Peer Collaborative Teacher (PCT) who helps organize inter-visitations among school staff as well as helping to deepen teacher understanding of effective teaching practices. Teachers shared that most written and verbal feedback is aligned to promoting high-quality student discussions and students asking questions and using formative assessment strategies throughout lessons. During the teacher team meeting, teachers shared that administration provides them with discussion protocols, gives them different protocols and techniques to try to help them make improvements in these key focus areas. During weekly professional development sessions, administrators check in with staff to gather feedback to see if training offered is helping them meet instructional expectations.

- Teachers receive regular feedback from administration about their work. The principal communicates expectations on a regular basis by making announcements or having conversations with teachers. One teacher commented that the assistant principal comes to classes, observes teachers, and allocates time to ensure that the feedback is understandable for them to make improvements. Administration routinely assigns a cooperating or buddy teacher, who is strong in a particular area of the Danielson Framework for Teaching with teachers who need improvement in the same component. As a result, teachers are held accountable for implementing the components of the framework that help to have more authentic student-to-student discussions, checking regularly for student understanding throughout lessons and making on-the-spot adjustments as needed.

- The school created a document called a Merge Document that communicates a child’s progress and breaks down student transcripts into parent-friendly language. The document provides a detailed analysis including feedback on how students are progressing towards graduation. It has the number of credits attempted and exams earned, points earned for completing online activities, and directions on how to read the transcript. This tool is shared regularly with parents at teacher conferences and upon request. In addition, a progress report is prepared for parents as well as allowing parents access to an online grading management system. Parents commented that they are able to know what assignments their children missed or what they need to do in order to complete tasks. During the parent meeting, one parent shared, “I come to the school and they provide me with information about the changes to the curricula that is different than when I went to school. It is funny, my child can complete work on the computer but I have a rubric so I know what is expected of them.” Most parents receive consistent communication on the expectations for standards-based work. The school also offers training to help parents understand the requisites.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

There are distributed leadership structures in place at the school. Teachers consistently analyze the results of assessment data and student work for groups of students.

Impact

Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions such as programming, curricular resources, school-wide strategy use that affect student learning across the school. The work of teacher teams has helped improved teacher practice in planning challenging academic tasks and students progressing towards their short-term and long-term goals.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders referred to their open-door policy to allow teachers opportunities to collaborate with them about important decisions. Similarly, in the teacher team meeting, department heads shared that they are able to speak to school administration about the types of programs, resources, and structures they would like to put into place. For example, teachers noted that they worked cooperatively with administrators to design the asynchronous learning environment in which students are able to work remotely from home on units and topics. This affords students opportunities to complete coursework without being in the physical school building. Most teachers are able to make decisions that affect student learning across the school.

- Teacher teams consistently review and analyze data sets housed in an online learning management platform, performance tasks, pre- and post-assessments, and mock Regents exams. Teacher teams look at these various data sources to help inform the type of instructional practices that will be used to support students across grades and subjects. Teachers noticed that students were not explaining their thinking when completing constructed-response math questions on the pre-assessment. Teachers worked on creating tools and tasks that not only pushed students’ thinking to defend their answer, but also be able to problem-solve, represent their work and communicate their understanding. Evidence reviewed during the visit showed that more students showed their work and presented different solutions on their post-assessments. Teachers shared that they have improved their practice in incorporating more Depth of Knowledge levels three and four tasks that are real-world aligned. As a result, students performing in the lowest third and students with disabilities are demonstrating progress towards the school’s math Regents pass-rate goals.

- There are team leaders, coaches, mentors, and instructional leaders that help to track students, coordinate student activities, design special curricula, and organize school programs for students. Most teachers shared that they are able to communicate suggestions and ideas and take leadership roles after consulting with school administration. For example, teachers helped to initiate and co-plan the Community Building Day to help with the school’s culture and create the checkric tool that is being used by most departments in order to provide feedback to students as well as conference with students. Both administrators and teachers shared that there are distributed leadership structures in place, so that teachers have a voice in important decisions resulting in teachers feeling empowered to affect students’ learning experiences at the school.