Quality Review Report

2017-2018

J.H.S. 054 Booker T. Washington
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 03M054
103 West 107 Street
Manhattan
NY 10025

Principal: Elana Elster

Dates of Review:
December 19, 2017 - December 20, 2017

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


School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</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>
</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>
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### Systems for Improvement

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Findings
School leaders and parents effectively partner to encourage the development of college and career readiness skills. High expectations for students are systematically communicated through the honor code and are routinely reinforced by teachers.

Impact
A diverse student population makes progress toward meeting expectations and take ownership of their educational experience.

Supporting Evidence
- Parents work closely with the school to ensure that students meet expectations and are prepared for success in rigorous high school programs. One parent worked with her son’s teachers to implement smart pen technology for taking digital notes in class. The teachers not only implemented the smart pen, but also helped transfer prior notes into the digital notebook. One parent stated, and others agreed, that working with teachers “is a two-way street, we expect them to hold us accountable too.” Parents stated that one of the most important roles they play in helping their children is working with teachers to manage academic and social stress.
- Parents are informed about the guidance and advisement opportunities available to their children. Before the school day two times a week, teachers have office hours and provide opportunities for small group instruction. Guidance for articulation to high school begins in seventh grade. In eighth grade, there is a dedicated counselor to help parents and students schedule auditions and admission interviews and tests.
- There is a schoolwide policy on independent reading that outlines the requirement that all students must read at least 25 books each school year, chosen from among different genres, such as non-fiction, plays, and classic fiction. Students arrive early to school to go to the library to read and study. Data for the library during the month of November 2017, show that the number of students who attended daily ranged from 70 to almost 160. Ninety-seven percent of this school’s former eighth graders were on track for graduation after their first year of high school.
- Teachers communicate high expectations for students to develop college readiness skills such as research and note taking and require them to use planners to ensure timeliness for assignments and projects. In one class, the teacher modeled notetaking strategies. The principal posts signs with vocabulary words with definitions, parts of speech, and synonyms in the hallways and stairwells to remind students that developing academic language is necessary for success in high school. Over 80 percent of students in each demographic sub-group pass State exams in English Language Arts (ELA) and more than 70 percent in each sub-group pass the math exams.
- Students explained that they are well informed about the expectations for academic and personal performance. A guide book articulates that all students are expected to “reach their highest potential with integrity and honor.” It goes on to outline the rules for conduct and academic performance. The honor code stipulates that students will be honest and respectful of the school community and that they “will expect the same from others.” Students explained how they use an online platform to track their grades and ensure assignments are complete. One student stated that teachers encourage them to put the grades they receive in perspective, “The idea is that we need to focus on learning and not only on the grade.” Parents indicated that they feel strongly that having the online gradebook allows students to own their own learning and to take responsibility for their own progress.
**Area of Focus**

<table>
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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**

Teachers establish and use detailed grading policies, assessments, and rubrics that are aligned with schoolwide curricula. Strong peer- and self-assessment practices and checks for understanding are consistently utilized.

**Impact**

Rubric-based, actionable, and personal feedback to students guides them in improving their work. Assessment results are used to effectively adjust instruction that meets the learning needs of all students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Every grade establishes a grading policy outlining the weight given to assessments and class participation. Individual teachers also inform students about how their work will be assessed. One teacher indicates that to receive a grade of A plus, or exceeding expectations, written responses must show “deep thinking and a complete understanding of the text.” Some teachers create rubrics that are specific to the activity or project. For example, travel brochures for tourists from around the world were graded according to a rubric that specified the accuracy of the currency conversions. A rubric for an earth science project specifies the components of accuracy of latitude markings, including the equator and the polar circles, and the proper tilt of the Earth.

- In addition to rubric-based grading, most teachers provide feedback to students to support them in improving their performance. On an essay based on *The Outsiders*, the teacher urged the author to clarify the thesis by asking, “What do you want your readers to think/know/believe?” Further comments reminded the student not to summarize too much and to include the page number citations to the text. On an earth science project about the layers of the Earth, the teacher noted that a student had not consistently labeled units of measure. On a persuasive essay, a teacher commended a student for trying to use new vocabulary and suggested that a word may not be the best choice in the context. However, the same level of actionable feedback was not provided on all student work and some math assignments were not accompanied by rubrics.

- Students assess the work of their peers, formally and informally, and provide suggestions for how to improve based on rubrics. Students in a humanities class reviewed scenes created to mirror the mood and figurative language of *The Invisible Man*. Students exchanged draft papers and used a peer editing feedback protocol that required them to read carefully, write a compliment, make corrections for grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and underline sentences that are confusing. Using the peer feedback, students conducted self-assessments to determine two things they would do to improve their writing.

- A teacher created an exit assessment for a lesson on the Gilded Age that required students to use a graphic organizer to define the term, describe the characteristics, provide an illustration, and identify its opposite. Teachers indicated that checks for understanding of this kind are used to determine groupings for the next lesson. Although checks for understanding were not observed in every class, most teachers used them to monitor student discussions and performance in group work. During a rehearsal for an upcoming concert, the conductor stopped the performance to provide additional instruction on holding a note for the full value.
### Findings

School leaders and teachers ensure that curricula are aligned to standards and strategically integrate the development of academic vocabulary, critical thinking skills, and evidence-based writing. Rigorous habits and college and career skills are coherently embedded across all grades and content areas.

### Impact

College and career readiness is promoted by coherence in curricula across content areas. All groups of learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking and learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- An eighth-grade writing response in a unit on *A Raisin in the Sun*, requires students to synthesize commonalities between three civil rights leaders on the nature of dreams in the African-American community. The lesson plan for an integrated co-teaching (ICT) lesson on mixed numbers and improper fractions has students move from station to station to complete increasingly complex problem sets. The teacher prepared a packet of worksheets to support access to the activities at each station for students with disabilities.

- A science lesson plan uses the recent controversy over the inflation of the football in a championship game, known as Deflategate, to illustrate Boyle’s and Charles’ gas laws. The teacher included a guided question sheet as a scaffold to help struggling students develop arguments. The lesson plan also included extensions to develop the mathematical connections between air pressure and temperature.

- All students are challenged to engage in a language study rotation in grade six, after which they select Spanish, Latin, French, or Mandarin to continue in grades seven and eight. Many students place out of first-year language requirements in high school. Students also have the opportunity to take Regents level courses in math and science.

- School leaders review lesson and unit plans and participate in team meetings to ensure alignment of the school-created curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards as well as content standards and the schoolwide instructional emphasis on learning through rigorous content for college and career readiness. A unit plan for instrumental music identifies standards from the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning Music related to “exploring, creating, replicating, and observing music.” The math curriculum map for grades six through eight identifies essential questions and enduring understandings and skills that will be required for success in high school, such as learning to use graphing calculators.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

Teaching practices across the school are based on a coherent set of beliefs that students learn best through inquiry, discovery, investigation, and interpretation informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The development of work products and discussions actively engage students across the vast majority of classrooms.

Impact

Across the vast majority of classrooms, meaningful student work products demonstrate high levels of thinking, participation, and ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The belief that students learn best with challenging and meaningful content was reflected in instruction across the school. In one class, the teacher formed groups of students to conduct a lab on the Big Bang Theory and the role of a singularity in the expansion of the universe. In an ICT class, students helped each other review for an upcoming test on operations with mixed numbers while the teacher conferred with individual students. One student stated, “I want to be confident on the test.” The development of academic vocabulary was coherently integrated into lessons across the grades and content areas.

- Students participating in Model United Nations prepare by researching topics and formulating arguments with evidence to support and refute both sides. Students argued that it is important to name the source of the information you cite to determine if there are any hidden assumptions. Several students were debating the accuracy of statements about the number of people who committed crimes after being granted amnesty by the Amnesty Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

- Students create project displays that are accompanied by extended writing tasks. For a science experiment on determining the best temperature at which to store popcorn kernels, a student prepared a lab report that included illustrations, descriptions of taste and texture, graphs of quantitative data on the percent of popped kernels based on temperature, and reflections on possible sources of error in the experiment. Students created travel brochures and presented them at a fair for fellow students. A grade seven student wrote a letter to the Walt Disney Company outlining the historical errors in its portrayal of Pocahontas and argued that “by showing children this movie, the next generation is given an incorrect perception on that part of history.”
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
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Findings

School leaders support teachers, with attention to new teachers, with frequent cycles of observation and effective feedback. Professional development (PD), including intervisitations, is based on observation and analysis of student work and data and is designed to meet the needs of all teachers.

Impact

Effective strategies based on informed decisions are in place to deepen professional growth and reflection. The school leader makes informed decisions about assignment and replacement of staff and encourages promotion from within the school community.

Supporting Evidence

- New teachers receive support beginning in the summer with orientation and support sessions with a mentor teacher. School leaders support them with regular observations that are followed by discussions of patterns and trends in performance. Intervisitations, accompanied by a mentor or supervisor, are scheduled with a specific focus so that successful or promising practices can be observed. A new teacher orientation agenda includes an introduction to the faculty handbook, ideas for how to prepare for the first day of school, and suggested lesson planning templates.

- School leaders plan a cycle of observations that build on the recommendations from prior classroom visits. The principal reviews all observations conducted by others to ensure consistent feedback is provided. Observation reports include effective feedback based on the analysis of student work and teacher performance. For example, one observation noted the alternative viewpoints the students expressed with evidence to support their positions. Another observation suggested that the teacher incorporate a reflection in the form of a question about how they improved their work based on “the feedback from your last writing assignment.” Teachers indicated that their goals are not separate from the learning objectives in their lesson plans, but they agreed that the feedback they get from school leaders helps them improve their instructional practices.

- Teachers plan and revise the monthly calendar for PD, incorporating ideas that arise from trends in observation data that are identified by school leaders. Teachers facilitate these meetings, as well as the regular department and grade-level collaborative team meetings across the school. For example, teachers suggested that there should be an emphasis on developing strategies and instructional models to meet the growing demand for ICT classes. Teachers also reflect on their practices as they support each other by serving as mentors and conducting peer intervisitations.

- The principal reviews observations of classroom instruction and adjusts the assignments of teachers and paraprofessionals to ensure their partnerships are effective. The school hosts student teachers from local universities, providing the opportunity to train potential new teachers. School leaders, teachers, and students participate in evaluating the candidates to ensure they understand the culture of the school. A student urged the principal to hire one teacher candidate by saying, “Hire him before he gets away.” The principal makes deliberate choices “to bring up people from within the school,” providing opportunities for teachers to move out of classroom positions and take on leadership roles.
**Additional Finding**

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

**Findings**

All teachers participate in horizontal grade teams and vertical departmental teams that use inquiry protocols to facilitate collaboration. These teams systematically analyze student work and data for students they teach.

**Impact**

Schoolwide, the coherence of instruction, professional capacity of teachers, and academic performance for all learners continue to improve.

**Supporting Evidence**

- All teachers are involved in weekly collaborative teams on grade and department levels, including ICT partner teachers. Teachers meet in grade content meetings to discuss and plan curricula, coordinate lesson plans, and share instructional strategies. During these meetings, teachers create extensive curriculum maps for all content areas. These maps are revised to reflect the experience of teaching the units and the learning outcomes of the students. A curriculum map for seventh-grade humanities notes revisions made by teachers to require students to “identify the characteristics of a reliable source.” A science curriculum map identifies projects the teachers want to remove from future units of study, such as the “scientific method comic strip” and the “cell transport poster.”

- Across the school, in addition to engaging students in learning rigorous content, teacher teams have been focusing on developing scaffolded questioning techniques to address a growing need for instruction in the ICT model. During vertical team meetings, teachers focus on identifying the cognitive and content skills that are needed from grade to grade and to build units of study by eighth grade that expose students to content at high school levels. Students had high levels of achievement on the 2017 State assessments, with 87 percent of all students meeting or exceeding proficiency in math and 90 percent meeting or exceeding proficiency in ELA. These levels of student performance represent an improvement over the performance in 2016, in which the levels were 82 percent in ELA and 85 percent in math.

- Humanities teachers examined samples of an extended writing task to identify issues they could address in future instruction. Teachers followed a Learning from Student Work Protocol to focus on the implications for classroom practice. One teacher suggested that they should focus on identifying how students developed evidence in their writing and there was a discussion about the difference between the structure and the quality of the supporting evidence. When an issue of phrases being used repeatedly was identified as a pattern, the team discussed a variety of strategies and tools they could use to help students write with more variety. For example, they discussed using word sorting activities and decided to explore using online tools to analyze word choice and complexity. School leaders noted that the schoolwide average ratings for teacher performance on the component of engaging students in learning improved every year from 2015 to 2017.