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

M.S. 243 Center School serves students in grade 5 through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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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>
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<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>
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<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building and social-emotional support is informed by a theory of action that students learn and grow best when they are working in collaborative, mixed-grade groups engaged in projects and have opportunities to take ownership of their own learning through reflection and discussion. The advisory structure supports students’ social-emotional development and academic learning.

Impact

The school environment is safe and inclusive, supports students’ progress toward academic achievement and social-emotional development, and meaningfully involves student voice in guiding school improvement efforts. Each student is known well by an advisor who personalizes supports and has a positive impact on social-emotional development and academic growth.

Supporting Evidence

- The school environment is safe and inclusive, and structures are informed by the shared school theory of action. All courses, except math and Latin, consist of mixed-grade groupings, and the four-year cycle of course offerings ensures all students leave prepared for high school. Students and parents reported the mixed-grade groupings as a primary reason for choosing the school, because of the inclusive environment it facilitates. Students reported learning from the different perspectives of mixed ages in classes. Older students explained how they developed leadership skills as a result of collaborating with younger students, and younger students reported feeling welcomed by older classmates and having extra support in addition to the teacher. Each new fifth-grade student is assigned an eighth-grade buddy, who serves as a mentor, calling the fifth grader prior to school starting and then being matched in the same homeroom class. Student discussions in classrooms reflected equal participation from all students, and communication had a friendly tone across classrooms. There are zero incidents in the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS), and students reported very little conflict; they reported feeling safe and welcome across classrooms.

- The advisory system serves as the connection between the school, student, and home, and integrates student voice into its program. The advisor is the primary point of contact for a student and his or her family related to both social-emotional development and academic progress. Each staff member has an advisory group for one year consisting of twelve to fourteen students from mixed grades. Students list three staff members on a preference sheet, and the staff collaborates to create the mixed groups based on matching needs of the group with qualities of the advisor. Advisory groups meet once per week and each student communicates with his or her advisor individually through a journal. Advisory topics are responsive to student needs, and at the beginning of the year there is a focus on the Writing and Thinking program, a partnership with Bard, that helps students understand and leverage the connection between writing and critical-thinking across content areas.

- The theater arts and speech programs support social-emotional learning and youth development through a focus on building confidence, risk-taking, and collaborative relationships. All students participate in the program and have performed in and worked in technical behind the scenes roles on at least nine productions before graduating. There are dedicated teachers for dance, chorus, speech, and vocal coaching. Students reported developing confidence and comfort in front of large groups and improved public speaking skills as well as feeling more comfortable taking risks and “putting themselves out there” as a result of the program.
Area of Focus

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

Findings

Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and courses. While teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of checks for understanding and student self and peer assessment, there were limited opportunities to observe these practices in some classrooms.

Impact

Teachers use assessments of student learning to adjust curricula and instruction through planning and collaboration, but there were missed opportunities to use assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward instructional goals for all students. There were some missed opportunities to make effective adjustments to lessons to meet all students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Faculty use common assessments and rubrics to assess learning and progress through student portfolios and frequent student reflection opportunities. Faculty reflected on results from state assessments to identify areas of student need, including supporting inferences with text evidence and integrating evidence from informational and literary texts. Faculty administer performance tasks three times a year to determine student progress toward goals, identifying a group of about seventeen students who needed support in these areas based on performance on the first task given at the beginning of the year. In addition, teachers use rubrics for class projects and support student reflection of progress. However, there were limited incidences of assessments being used to create a clear picture of student progress toward increased mastery in these areas.

- Across classrooms, teachers utilize checks for understanding to make effective lesson adjustments. In a science class, students worked in small groups on a climate change project, and the teacher checked in on groups to see which groups or individuals needed support, asking additional questions to push student thinking as needed or provide feedback on a task. However, such practices were not evident in the vast majority of classrooms observed. In a grade six math lesson, the teacher asked students to complete a math task from the textbook. The teacher asked a student to read the question aloud, and then students worked in pairs on the task. Pairs completed the task at different paces, and as the teacher circulated, she noticed most students were successful with the task. When some students had nothing to do, she directed the class to move to the next problem so they “wouldn’t get bored or start distracting others.” The teacher then reviewed all parts of the task with the whole group. The teacher missed an opportunity to adjust the lesson so that all students were engaged and challenged at their level.

- Student self-assessment and peer assessment were observed across classrooms. In a science classroom, students working on a group project utilized a rubric to assess their progress and check each other’s work on various tasks. In an eighth-grade math class, students shared their problem-solving work on white boards and presented to the class. Students were able to peer assess each other’s work and ask questions to facilitate discussion. However, these practices were not evident in the vast majority of classrooms. In a sixth-grade math class, students worked in pairs on a warm-up activity, but did not have a way to assess their work and needed to wait for a whole-class review. Some students finished early and were ready to move on.
## Additional Finding

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

Faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and content standards through unit and lesson planning. Academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills through frequent writing, problem-solving, and discussion opportunities across subjects for all learners.

### Impact

Faculty planning across multi-grade courses and content areas integrates the instructional shifts, builds coherence, and promotes college and career readiness. Curricula are accessible for a variety of learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- In math, dual fluency is emphasized through problem-solving that is mapped backwards and embedded vertically from the eighth-grade Algebra 1 Regents along with an emphasis on number sense and operational skills in fifth and sixth grades. The faculty adopted the Exeter math curriculum as the anchor resource in eighth grade because of its alignment to the demands of the Algebra Regents and its emphasis on complex problem-solving using multiple strategies.

- Teachers focus on making claims and inferences using text-based evidence throughout multiple courses, in particular literature and social studies, which are mapped in four year cycles to enable mixed-grade classes. Text complexity increases throughout the year using a variety of genres and grade-level and above texts. Social studies courses embed primary sources and literary nonfiction along with novels related to the content to provide a balance of literary and informational texts, contextualizing the historical time period and building background knowledge and vocabulary.

- Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are supported in meeting grade-level curricula through Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes and an enrichment block that meets four times per week to provide additional access to course content. Teachers analyze student work to inform areas of the curriculum to review or emphasize so that all learners can access the complex texts and improve writing skills across content areas. Teachers emphasize writing and note-taking for all students by providing differentiated materials with sentence frames to structure notes and text-based responses, as noted in a mixed-grade social studies lesson plan. Modifications in an ICT social studies lesson plan indicated groupings, supplemental definitions, and questions read as needed.

- Rigorous discussion and collaborative work habits are embedded across grades and subjects for all learners through the mixed-grade groupings and small group literature discussions, with emphasis in enrichment classes. Literature units build in time for students to discuss texts in small groups before moving to whole-class discussion to facilitate greater engagement and support the needs of all learners. Collaborative tasks enable students to represent their thinking in multiple ways, such as in a science task where the lesson plan indicated information was to be presented by the group using performance, visual models, text, and digital presentation.
Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs that students learn best in mixed age groupings engaged in collaborative learning activities with high levels of discussion. Students demonstrate high levels of thinking through group work products and small and whole group discussions.

Impact
Student work products reflect the school’s beliefs in collaborative group work and social-emotional structures in learning, as well as high levels of student thinking and participation in tasks and discussions across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- A mixed-grade science class on climate change reflected the school’s beliefs in group project work and resulted in high levels of student engagement. Students worked in mixed-grade small groups on a project on atmospheric levels, utilizing articles and visual models to inform their mixed media presentations. Presentations included PowerPoints with summarized information, supported by visual models that ranged from a constructed 3-D model to charts and graphics, to represent the three analogies each group came up with to explain concepts of climate change and the atmosphere. Groups also included a song to perform that included their analogies. The teacher supported learning by circulating through the class and asking targeted questions to push thinking, acting as a facilitator to support groups’ sharing with one another.

- Students in an eighth-grade algebra class engaged in a whole-class discussion to work through selected problems from the homework. Students first worked in small groups to discuss their work, and then selected students recorded their work on a whiteboard. Each student had an opportunity to facilitate a whole-group discussion on the work displayed and fielded questions from students about why he or she solved the problem in a certain way or what would happen if a different number was used with the method. If a student was struggling to articulate an idea, the teacher provided support through posing questions, but he mainly stepped back and allowed students to lead the discussion. Students were observed taking notes and posing questions throughout the discussion. As a result, student discussions and work products demonstrated high levels of student thinking, participation, and leadership.

- A sixth-grade math teacher facilitated a discussion on mean and median with a set of numbers in response to a student asking the group for help understanding something. Students shared their thinking on whether they thought the mean or the median was a more helpful data point and debated the significance of the outlier number in the set. One student discussed why she thought the median was more helpful, since the outlier affected the average, and another couple of students debated whether or not the outlier should be kept in the set. The teacher facilitated the discussion by asking students to justify their thinking and whether they agreed or disagreed with each other. The student with the misconception was able to clarify her understanding by the end of the lesson and articulate where she went wrong. The class discussion demonstrated high levels of student thinking, debate, and participation.
Findings
School staff consistently communicate high expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with students and families through the advisory program, progress reports, and student-led conferences. Teachers establish a culture for learning that communicates unified high expectations across classrooms for all students.

Impact
Strong school-family partnerships support student progress toward high expectations for college and career readiness. Teachers provide clear and effective feedback and advisement supports to ensure that all students own their educational experiences and are prepared for high school and beyond.

Supporting Evidence

- Faculty effectively communicate and successfully partner with families to support student progress toward expectations. The advisory program provides small groups of students with a dedicated advisor for one year who meets with them weekly, communicates individually with students through a journal, and serves as the main point of contact for parents. Parents reported how much they appreciated the advisory system, including having one contact who knows their children, has clear expectations for the year, and can coordinate communication with teachers for them (instead of their having to manage multiple teachers). Advisors and parents sign off on students' tests, and parents reported the value in having a staff member who is dedicated to understanding the academic progress and goals across subjects for their children.

- The fifth-grade teacher teams establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations and provides support and feedback to ensure all students own their educational experiences and are prepared for the next level. The “Getting it Together” program supports fifth-graders transitioning to the school community by acclimating students to the school model, preparing them to engage in mixed-grade courses and critical thinking through frequent discussion and writing that is built into courses. Students reported that this program prepared them to transition as new students, helped them build relationships, and made them confident with the systems for grading and reflection that are part of the school model. Each fifth-grade student is paired with an eighth-grade buddy who serves as a mentor, helping navigate the schedule, build relationships, and become comfortable with the mixed-grade class model. Students receive a calendar and learn about organization, keeping track of homework, and taking ownership by reflecting on coursework through the progress report and report card process.

- Students take a mini-course in eighth grade that prepares them for the high school application process. Students are supported in identifying the schools they would like to apply to and prepare themselves for the application process, including interviews, portfolio presentations, and auditions. Students begin visiting high schools in the spring of seventh grade, and they reported opportunities to tour schools in small groups from seventh through eighth grade. Eighth grade students reported feeling very prepared for the application process and received personalized support from the principal through the mini-course. They felt confident in selecting a list of various schools and in preparing for the requirements needed for the application. Seventh grade students also reported working on art portfolios in preparation for specialized high school applications. As a result of faculty support, effective guidance, advisement, and feedback to students, all students own their educational experiences and are prepared for the transition to high school.
Additional Finding

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations, including department teams. Distributed leadership structures include shared ownership of the advisory program, data tracking, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and budget management.

Impact

Teacher teamwork promotes implementation of the Common Core and strengthens teachers’ instructional capacity through the sharing of practices and lesson discussions. Teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning outcomes across the school through the distributed leadership structures.

Supporting Evidence

- The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based teacher team work that analyzes student work to promote the implementation of the Common Core and strengthen teacher instructional capacity. In a math team meeting, teachers looked at work related to fractional operations that reflected various misconceptions seen in a problem-solving task. The team discussed the connections between the instructional strategies of the new curricula and gaps seen in student work in order to inform instructional next steps. Teachers reported that their instructional practices have improved as a result of learning how other teachers incorporate strategies into their instruction. Additionally, teachers are able to identify opportunities to build vertical coherence in instruction that supports student success with the eighth-grade Algebra 1 Regents, which advances the school goal of a 100 percent passing rate on that exam.

- Teacher teams meet prior to the start of the school year to present course plans, give each other feedback, review alignment to the Common Core, and make adjustments. Teams work on alignment of strategies to address areas of need for students, including using text-based evidence to support claims and making inferences across content areas. This collaborative work strengthens teacher practice to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers include strategies to support the reading and discussion of complex texts for all students through the inclusion of audiobooks, sentence frames for responses, and aligned support in enrichment classes.

- Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. Teachers take the lead in identifying curricula resources and programs. For example, the math teachers analyzed eighth-grade Algebra 1 Regents results and determined that students needed greater support with problem-solving, including explaining and justifying their work, and so the team piloted use of a new math curricular resource last year. This year, they decided to use it for the full 8th grade curriculum. Two teachers lead the development of IEP goals and meetings with families to discuss progress and goal-setting. Another teacher takes the lead on managing data for the school and assists with analyzing assessments across subjects to inform curricular and instructional adjustments, supporting teacher teams with analysis spreadsheets and data tracking. Yet another teacher supports managing the budget and working with teachers and the principal to allocate funds and determine needs based on student data and instructional programs and partnerships. As a result of the distributed leadership structure, all teachers have a key role in affecting student learning outcomes.