Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School
K-12 all grades 06M348
511 West 182Nd Street
Manhattan
NY 10033

Principal: Thomas Rochowicz

Dates of Review:
February 27, 2018 - February 28, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Phyllis Siwiec
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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects, then planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

All learners, including English as a New Language (ENL) learners and students with disabilities, demonstrate their thinking, have access to the curriculum, and are cognitively engaged along with the lowest- and highest-achieving students.

Supporting Evidence

- Rigorous tasks and higher-order thinking skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks so that all learners demonstrate their thinking. In a grade-two integrated unit that included English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies entitled “Manhattan: Island of Immigrants,” the Expeditionary Learning (EL) design augments the rural, suburban, and urban unit by zeroing in on the major focus of Manhattan. The timeline New York City and Manhattan history has four major periods for the students to explore. These include the Lenape Native American settlement, the Dutch and their cultural and technological influences, the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries Ellis Island and tenements and the Great Migration with the Harlem Renaissance. Guiding questions include, “How has NYC changed over time?” “How has each group of immigrants’ shaped NYC’s history and culture?” “Why do immigrants move?” and “What are the benefits and tensions that come with immigration?” The final student products included historical fiction as a written third-person narrative with two small moments from two different time periods with frozen tableaus in groups as authors read aloud their original narratives.

- Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data so that all learners can access the curricula and are cognitively engaged. In a grade-ten earth science unit, the academic learning target is stated as “I can explore what our new case study is about—that is the idea ‘Are we alone in the universe?’” Essential questions included that question and “What does the universe look like and is there any other place like Earth?” The summative unit assessment is a Socratic seminar discussing students’ research conclusions about “Are we alone?” In order to support and prepare all students for this assessment, the teacher strategically grouped students based on prior academic performance in diagnostics, projects, labs and quizzes along with social behavior. ENL students and students with disabilities were placed along the perimeter of the classroom so that the teachers can more easily provide them with extra assistance and guidance. Students have also been intentionally grouped to help balance each other’s strengths and weaknesses and to support each other. For this lesson, students worked in heterogeneous groups of four. Teachers provided additional scaffolding to those who struggled starting with complex text.

- Differentiated groupings list supports in lesson plans for students so all can cognitively engage in the tasks. In a grade eight-math lesson, the lesson is one in a series based on geometry and graphing. The class has been divided into four distinct groups regarding categories of levels of support. These groups are those with whom communication in specific ways is needed as in non-verbal cues and reference charts; in the environment strategies, students who need preferential seating are listed and technical auditory support; academic support has those who need frequent check-ins and tools; and behavioral students who need positive praise, positive rule reminders, and conduct sheets to track behavior concerns.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: Proficient |

Findings

Feedback to most teachers accurately captures strengths, challenges, and next steps using Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching*. School leaders have an effective system that uses teacher observation data to design and facilitate professional development and make informed decisions and to develop succession plans.

Impact

While feedback is given in teacher observations, it does not yet align with teachers’ professional goals. Although school leaders have an effective system to use teacher observation data, they have not implemented a strategic, transparent system to manage professional development, make informed decisions, and develop succession plans that lead to overall improved quality of student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Feedback was given to teachers in *Advance* observation reports. In one example, the evaluator wrote about the teacher’s strengths as observed in the lesson including anticipating student responses and misconceptions; areas for growth in reviewing the learning target to help guide students who need more reminders and revisits throughout the lesson. Next steps focused on determining a method to revisit the learning target more frequently. In another example, the feedback stated as strengths that students were engaged and presented evidence, and that the teacher provided multiple scaffolds. An area for growth was to incorporate a clear closing to a lesson/block as well as an opening to the next lesson/block. Next steps included debriefing by revisiting the learning target and either having students self-assess or complete an exit ticket. None of the examined feedback referred to teachers’ professional goals that were established in the Initial Planning Conference in the fall.

- As stated by school leaders, teacher observation data is a key assessment measure that drives professional development planning, external development opportunities, intervisitation, and coaching cycles. Administrators conduct official *Advance* observations and unofficial instructional rounds using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, noting progress and identifying trends. In most cases, school leaders use the observations to provide strengths, questions, areas for growth, and an actionable next step, aligned to the area for growth and potentially leveraging the resources such as current professional development cycles, a mentor teacher, or colleague. School leaders have an effective system that uses teacher observation data to effectively design and facilitate professional development as shared by school leaders and teachers. However, they have yet to move toward a strategic and transparent system for managing professional development, make informed decisions and developing succession plans regarding assignments, tenure, and retention about staff.

- The school has instituted an EL tool for looking at high quality student work. As an EL school, school leadership and staff are committed to designing the necessary supports so all students can achieve at this level. As EL states, “EL education is distinguished in the educational landscape by the explicit focus on high-quality student work as an essential part of student achievement.” The three qualities that are attributes of high-quality student work are complexity, craftsmanship and authenticity. Teachers and students spoke of craftsmanship in particular as necessary in creating work that one can be proud of and that striving for it is worth the struggle.
Additional Finding

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

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices demonstrate the school’s coherent belief that students learn best by following the EL model and informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In addition, student work products and discussions are integral to the demonstration of the beliefs in action.

Impact

All students produce meaningful work products that reflect high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s belief system is that students learn best when they are engaged by rigorous, relevant curricula that result in complex, authentic student work made better with craftsmanship. An example of this belief statement was demonstrated in a grade-twelve ELA class integrated with social studies resulting in social action that involved research about local community-based organizations (CBOs). This unit of study was launched with guiding questions: “What social issues are in our community?” and “What local organizations are working to help solve those social issues?” Each student had a laptop but all were seated in groups to discuss relevant issues involved in using the internet for research. The primary focus was on using the internet to research CBOs with the guidance, “Things to look out for and tips for helping to focus your information gathering.” Each student was engaged in learning more about CBOs that address the individual's interest. Several students shared sites with others in their group who were interested in similar topics. Some students looked at agencies involved in supporting those who are living in shelters, some were interested in learning more about immigration issues.

- Students spoke about the importance of craftsmanship when interviewed. One student shared an essay that addressed a question he had generated, “Which political party lives up to American ideals?” He was interested in exploring the potential bias engendered in the investigation. He spoke about the opportunities to develop and revise writing, working with peers, receiving their feedback, striving to create something insightful and original. Ultimately, he learned that “Essays can be creative, even greater if you can challenge yourself.” Another student addressed craftsmanship as it pertained to a group video project that was created to help incoming grade nine students with their orientation. Working with two other team members, they thought about their own ‘freshmen year’ and how much they had “slacked-off.” Here was their chance to advise incoming students about not wasting their time, problem-solving and taking responsibility for their work and actions. Their approach was with humor. “No one wants a lecture,” he said.

- In a kindergarten bilingual Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class explored “Busy Bees: Bees and Pollination.” The unit integrated literacy, social studies and science. The culminating event was for students to teach their families how important bees are through their published e-books, displayed through tablets and projectors. Afterwards they planned to march with signs to the mailbox to send a letter to EPA Commissioner Sapienza, the Schools Chancellor, Mayor DeBlasio, and the principal to help create awareness and “Save the Bees!” The unit was launched with a series of activities that small groups of students participated in exploring. The context was that a lost honeybee was trying to find out if Washington Heights is a friendly place to be. The students had the opportunities to smell blooming flowers, taste sweet honey, look closely at pictures of fuzzy bees, the feel of squishy honeycomb, and hear the sound of buzzing bees. Then they wrote everything they experienced through their five senses. The student thinking, participation, and ownership in the study of bees was very evident.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 2.2 Assessment  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings

The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress towards goals with Thursday check-ins with crew leaders, data that is tracked to show progress and teachers who adjust curricular and instructional decisions. Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

To ensure that all students including ELLs and students with disabilities demonstrate increased mastery, teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use mastery-based grading so that teachers, students, and families can see student performance by learning target. This allows teachers to accurately adjust their planning based on the strengths and struggles of each individual student. Each student belongs to a crew and meets with the crew leader every Thursday to review progress and receive help and guidance with assignments or issues that may be interfering with progress. A clear picture of student progress is further developed through students sharing their strengths and areas for growth with their crew leader and family in student-led conferences three times a year; a participation rate of over 98 percent across the school was noted. Common literacy assessments in the lower grades (pre-K to grade three) include letter sound recognition, Fountas and Pinnell (F&P), Teachers College Writing Checklists and EL Education’s writing rubrics, all in English or Spanish. The reading level improvement moved from 20 percent of students at or above grade level in fall 2017 to 34 percent in mid-winter; an increase of 14 percentage points in four months. In math, problem-solving math benchmarks are used to produce data about problem-solving and math fluency. The data for kindergarten through grade three in math increased from an average of 1.95 in fall 2017 to 2.37 in winter 2018, an improvement of .42 in four months.

- In grades six through eight, the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) is administered three times per year. Reading improvement in 2016-2017 showed a growth average for grade 6 of 3.36; 4.85 for grade seven and 4.92 for grade eight. These compare to national norms of 3, 2 and 1 point increases. This middle school outperformed the national average by .36 in grade 6, however grade seven outperformed by 2.85 points and grade eight by 3.92 points.

- The Administrative Leadership Team (ALT) maintains a data dashboard to assess student outcomes by quarter, the Instructional Leadership Team in the middle grades and upper grades and lower grade cabinets hold beginning-of-year, mid-year and end-of-year meetings to analyze student work and data patterns, and every teacher participates in a quality work protocol. These practices support the creation and ongoing refinement of rigorous, engaging, coherent curricula aligned to the Common Core Standards.

- Teachers report that they use checks for understanding at strategic points in a lesson, such as after the mini-lesson, before the students move to group, partner or independent work. At this point there is an opportunity to clear up any misconceptions. There is also a mid-point check-in during the workshop. Follow-up, as observed, is either conferring, or revisiting with a small group or redirection to work with a partner.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff while working with teacher teams to establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact
School leaders provide training that results in a culture of mutual accountability for those expectations. Teachers provide clear, focused and effective feedback and guidance through the Habits of Work and Learning (HOWL) program to ensure that students own their educational experiences and are prepared for their future.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations in a number of ways including the staff handbook, classroom observation feedback, grade level team meetings twice weekly, department or school level professional development once a week, and weekly updates from each assistant principal (AP). In addition, expectations are shared and communicated regularly through a cabinet structure at each level, composed of grade-level team leaders as well as the assistant principals and principal. There is also a culture leadership team with administration and grades six through twelve team leaders and an instructional leadership team of administrators and grade six through twelve department chairs. The professional development for high expectations begins with summer planning each year; over 90 percent of staff, according to the principal, return a week early to collaborate on expectations and goals for the new school year.

- Training is provided to help define and manage the expectations that support the culture of mutual accountability. There are professional development sessions in a wide range of topics that address both the foundation and its implementation. In the lower grades, the professional development plan for the second half of the year includes a focus on organization and the writing process and authentic voice in the writing process. In the area of social-emotional learning, the focus is on integrity and perseverance. There is also evidence of whole school professional development and differentiated areas in data analysis, bilingual education, guided reading, and Intervisitation Day planning.

- Crew is the foundational opportunity to know students well and provide a sense of belonging, and the crew leader facilitates student-led conferences (SLC) and is the family’s first point of contact. While HOWLs live in every classroom, crew is where they are explicitly taught. Every student from pre-k to twelve is in a crew of fifteen students led by one crew leader, who is the primary point of contact for students and families in that crew. The crew leader facilitates activities and initiatives four to five days each week to build relationships with the students and support them in building relationships with each other.

- Student-led conferences are an integral way that students show ownership of their learning and their ability to communicate to parents and guardians the processes and products that are created and shared through portfolios. Students in grade eight and grade twelve complete ‘passage portfolios’ to demonstrate their readiness for the next step in their academic career based on their achievements and reflections, including HOWLs from the middle grades and upper grades. Community meetings in the middle upper grades and inter-grade community meetings in the lower grades are opportunities for the entire grade to celebrate progress and identify areas for growth.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Distributed leadership structures are embedded and foster teacher collaboration with school leaders. Teacher teams methodically analyze student work to develop strategies to improve instructional practices and student achievement.

Impact

Teachers play an integral role in making decisions that improve pedagogy and student achievement. The professional collaborations that systematically analyze student work result in improved teaching practices and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders believe that teams of teachers, led by teacher leaders and supported by school leaders, can best create community and improve student outcomes. Teachers work in grade-level teams that teach the same students in grades pre-kindergarten through nine and a majority of the same students in grades ten through twelve. These teams set specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely (SMART) goals and use a wealth of data, including progress to graduation trackers, attendance, survey data, F&P, DRP, fluency and writing (TCWR), numeracy (JARS) and gradebook data, all in an effort to assess where students are and what the teachers need to do to get them moving toward the next step. Informed by the Common Core standards and state standards, teachers analyze trends in student work in grade-level teams in pre-kindergarten through grade three and in departments in grades six through twelve to build vertical alignment in content and skills while informing instruction and curriculum decisions for each classroom and across the school. Two examples this year include shifting to Illustrative Math in middle grades math classrooms and Teachers College Writing practices in lower grade classrooms. These curricular decisions were made based on analysis of student work and data from last year.

- Observation of a kindergarten grade-level team revealed the process of using the ATLAS protocol to analyze the F&P reading level data from the mid-year assessment. After a low-inference sort by instructional levels, the teachers noticed that there was confusion with ‘el’ and ‘the,’ as well as with ‘car’ and ‘truck’ and ‘baby’ and ‘doll.’ They also noted strategies students used with new words, such as stretching out sounds, guessing using initial letter sounds, and stretching out with Spanish. The teachers continued sharing their initial noticings, and then moved to Interpreting the data and then implications for instruction. Morning share time was suggested as a time to reinforce verbally by pronouncing Spanish words and using Spanish sight words to help them expand their vocabulary.

- Distributed leadership structures are embedded and provide opportunities for teacher leadership development. This path moves through various leadership teams including the cabinet structure at each level, composed of grade-level team leaders, the culture leadership team that includes middle- and upper-grades team leaders, and the instructional leadership team of department leaders. The school administrators also take part in all these teams. There is also a learning partners team, focused on an inquiry task around increasing the use of Spanish in the lower grades dual language program, and the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI) team, focused on literacy growth in the middle grades.