Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Pioneer Academy
Elementary 24Q307
40-20 100Th Street
Queens
NY 11368

Principal: Cecilia Jackson

Dates of Review:
January 10, 2018 - January 11, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Lisa Reiter
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

Pioneer Academy serves students in grade K through grade 5. 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

**Instructional Core**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>
</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>
</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>Area of Focus</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>Area of Celebration</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

Across the school, grade teams meet on a consistent basis to analyze assessment data, student work products and to share teaching strategies. Distributive leadership structures are embedded resulting in effective teacher leadership.

Impact

Systematic analysis of student data and work products results in mastery of goals for groups of students. Teachers have an integral role in key decisions, such as the creation of an academic intervention team, which affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of the school year, teachers analyzed assessment data to place students in one of three tiers for both literacy and math instruction. During the grade-four math team meeting, teachers examined an error analysis report that detailed students’ results on the common assessment administered at the close of module three of the EngageNY curriculum. All students, including students with disabilities and ELLs demonstrated growth in solving multiple choice problems from module one to module three. However, data indicated that tier two and tier three students struggled with word problems that addressed the skill of multiplicative comparisons. Teachers noted that students had a strong grasp of that skill when presented with a numerical problem; however, when faced with the same skill in word problems, students were unable to solve the problem. Using a protocol, teachers discussed common issues resulting in students’ arrival at incorrect answers. Teachers concluded that they need to design an intervention that will help strengthen reading and understanding math word problems and specifically, reinforcing the use of annotation skills learned in English Language Arts (ELA) for math problems. Therefore, the systematic analysis of assessment data improves teacher practice and leads to mastery of goals for groups of students.

- Documents from various grade teams across the school show evidence of vocabulary growth and an increase in reading levels for students. The grade-five ELA team documents that the team’s target group, English Language Learners (ELLS), show mastery of the skills addressed in their inquiry cycle. Specifically, this team focused on determining the meaning of unknown words in text. Data showed that ELLs increased 29 percentage points from the beginning of the school year, as measured on an ELA benchmark assessment. Additionally across the school, teacher teams identified students in tier three as a focus group for reading instruction. A review of schoolwide data revealed students in this group increased one to two reading levels since the fall assessment; thus, showing mastery of goals for groups of students as a result of teacher teams.

- Teacher leadership led to the development of an academic intervention team. After observing a similar structure at another school, two teachers offered to create and facilitate this team. The purpose of this team is to support teachers in identifying possible interventions for students and prevent unnecessary referrals for special education. The teachers developed a protocol for teachers to refer students to this team. One teacher shared that forty-three percent of referrals to the team have led to successful interventions in the classroom and did not require an additional referral for special education services. Additionally, teachers on this team recommended creating special education liaison roles for each grade level to provide additional support, which school leaders agreed with and funded. Therefore, leadership structures are embedded and allow teachers to have an integral role in decisions across the school.
Findings

Written feedback captures teachers’ strengths, challenges and next steps using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. An effective system drives the use of teacher observation data in the design and facilitation of professional development (PD) as well as informed decisions as to teachers’ assignments.

Impact

Written feedback makes clear the expectation for teacher practice and the supports available to them; however, it is not consistently aligned with professional goals for teachers. Teacher observation data that results in schoolwide PD does not yet lead to improved student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Review of observation reports reveals teachers are provided with actionable feedback and supports to improve their practice. One observation report commends the teacher for her effective use of questioning techniques and students using accountable talk stems. The report includes next steps to move to highly effective in “Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques.” As a next step, the teacher is encouraged to allow students to initiate discussions and ask questions to each other. A resource of sample questions to encourage math discussions is included. Another observation report suggests strategies to incorporate the eight mathematical practices. While all observation reports accurately capture strengths and next steps, there is no direct connection to teachers’ professional goals that were determined during the initial planning conference.

- In addition to the reports that result from official classroom observations, there is valuable feedback offered to teachers through instructional rounds and unofficial classroom visits. School leaders conduct instructional rounds around students engaging in discussions in math classes. Examples of feedback offered to teachers through instructional rounds include advising teachers to provide manipulatives, allowing students to act out number stories, and offering strategies to promote student engagement. Additional feedback, such as various strategies and resources to increase student discussion opportunities, is provided through unofficial, quick classroom visits that also supports teacher practice.

- The determination was made that the whole-school PD foci for this year would be around “Questioning and Discussion Techniques.” This determination was made after reviewing *Advance* observation data and determining this component as high leverage. A review of the PD plan reveals alignment to this foci with PD on mathematical discussions and using questioning to facilitate student discussions. School leaders track teacher progress in this component of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and noted an increase in the number of teachers receiving effective or highly effective ratings. Additionally, teachers came to a quick consensus that PD is aligned to the instructional foci and has a positive impact on their teaching practice. School leaders are developing succession plans for key roles by building leadership capacity within teachers. Therefore, as a result of PD, instructional practices have been elevated and are beginning to show improvement in the quality of student work.
Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts with a focus on academic vocabulary and balancing literary and informational texts. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Curricula promote college and career readiness for all students. Faculty members adjust curricula into three different tiers so that a diversity of learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have access and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence consistent alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and the integration of the math instructional shifts. Teachers create “know, understand, do” (KUD) plans for each unit of study in all courses. For example, a grade four KUD plan includes time for fluency activities and time to explicitly teaching vocabulary. Additionally, in a grade-four lesson plan, students are asked to apply a math concept to a real-world situation when they investigate how the length of a ray changes the measurement of an angle. Students will write an evidence-based conclusion after completing the investigation. A grade-five lesson plan reveals that students complete different stations using fractions. In one station, students focus on solving real-world math problems using fractions, in another station students examine fraction values, and in a third station students practice adding and subtracting fractions with unlike denominators. At each station, students must explain how they solve the problems using academic vocabulary, precise math language.

- Curricular documents include assignments evidencing integration of the English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shifts. For example, a grade-five ELA lesson plan details an activity requiring students to provide peer feedback to each other on opinion essays. In the essays, students are to include text-based evidence to support their opinions. A grade-two KUD lesson plan reveals that students will use informational and literary text to support answers to both literal and inferential questions. Additionally, a grade-four lesson includes a task in which students use various texts and historical documents to answer questions. Thus, instructional shifts are integrated across grades and subjects to promote college and career readiness skills.

- A review of lesson plans and KUD plans across grades and subjects reveals teachers plan and refine tasks for three different tiers. For example, a kindergarten KUD reveals student groupings based on reading levels, and each tier receives different support to reach the same goal of writing how-to-books. For example, one group will visualize and track steps on fingers before drawing their steps, another group will sketch out the steps on a flow map first, and a third group will receive an additional mini-lesson and receive a model. A grade-four social studies lesson plan includes supports for ELLs such as vocabulary and key phrases in both English and Spanish. Additionally, the task is planned to support students in one of three tiers with supports such as a teacher-led small group and different graphic organizer. It is evident that teachers plan lessons to ensure all students have access to tasks that are cognitively engaging.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the belief that students learn best when engaged in data-based, small-group instruction. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact
As a result of small-group instruction, students produce meaningful work products. All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices reflected the belief that students learn best when in small groups. During a grade-four social studies class, in small groups students analyzed various documents and identified their noticings and wonderings and based upon them, completed a graphic organizer to make inferences. One group wondered what event occurred in the image. Another student wondered what might be off in the distance of the image his group reviewed. In another grade-four classroom, students answered questions using evidence from the text to support their answers. Students worked in groups to complete the task. One student explained that they were learning to paraphrase. Another explained the importance of restating the question when answering the questions.

- Across classrooms, students engage in different stations thus allowing teachers to provide additional support. In a grade-five math class, students worked in small groups to complete different stations. One group examined fraction value by using a number line to determine between which whole numbers improper fractions are located. Two other groups practiced adding and subtracting fractions both as a word problem and as numerical calculation. The teacher focused on providing additional support for students at the adding and subtracting fractions station. Additionally, students discussed which strategy they used to solve word problems with each other. For example, one student explained that after drawing a model he counted the shaded squares to determine the answer. Another student then tried that strategy to check his work. Since teachers consistently engage students in small group instruction, all students produce meaningful work products as evidenced in work folders and on display on bulletin boards.

- Across classrooms, teachers place students in one of three tiers and receive supports based on their tiers. For example, in a grade-three Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) math class, all students were to develop an understanding of the relationship between multiplication and area. Students in tier one explored how many shapes could fit in an octagon that was drawn on the floor and were self-directed through the task. Students in tiers two and three were using foam shapes to solve four problems and received support from one of the two teachers. Students in all groups engaged in a discussion on the difference between area and perimeter. In a grade-four social studies class, prompts were in English and Spanish to support ELLs. Students received a graphic organizer and additional support from the English as a New Language (ENL) teacher. The ENL teacher provided translation for students, as needed, thus allowing all students in her group to participate in the discussion. Therefore, multiple entry points consistently provide access to challenging activities as evidenced through student discussions and work products for all students, including ELLs and student with disabilities.
**Findings**

School leaders and teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

**Impact**

The school uses common assessment data to identify priority areas, such as vocabulary, and adjust curricula and instruction. Teachers’ use of assessment practices results in the design and delivery of instruction directly connected to student need.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school administers common assessments in reading and writing. The resulting data is used to adjust curriculum and teaching strategies. After reviewing the item analysis from the state ELA exam, it was noted that vocabulary acquisition was an area of need. As a result, all lesson plans must include a language objective, and teachers received professional learning in vocabulary acquisition to implement effective strategies, such as explicitly teaching vocabulary and providing more visuals. Additionally, data from a common reading assessment are used to place students in guided reading groups, in all grades, and a new guided reading strategy group structure is being implemented.

- Teachers continually check for understanding throughout daily lessons and make adjustments. In a grade-four social studies class, the teacher asked a small group of students if another student’s comment was a noticing or a wondering. The student stated that it was a noticing and they were trying to develop wonderings. The teacher then asked the student to provide feedback to his peer. In a grade-three ELA class, the teacher listened during a turn and talk in which students discussed the meaning of construct and thesis statement. The teacher noted that students read the meaning of thesis statement from a chart and asked them to restate in their own words. In a grade-three math class, after conferencing with students, the teacher reminded all students that area is the inside of the shape and perimeter is the outside of the shape. Therefore, teachers’ continuous checks for understanding support student learning.

- In all classes visited, students were seated in differentiated groups that were also posted in the classroom. Evidence revealed that students are assigned to different groups in relation to the lesson’s topic. Reading, writing, and math assessment data is used to determine the groups to which students are assigned. Additionally, these groups are flexible and are adjusted either in the course of a lesson based on the in-class assessment or when the administration of assessments reveals changes in student need, such as student guided reading and guided math groups.

- Students were observed using self-assessment tools like color-coded cards and checklists. In a grade-five ELA class, students used color-coded cards to show when they understood a topic or needed assistance. Additionally, students use checklists in ELA and math to self-assess. For example, a grade-two student used the checklist to identify that she was able to write the place value of the number with disks. Therefore, across classrooms, students engage in self-assessment practices that supports their learning.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to staff through the staff handbook, feedback and professional learning aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school provides ongoing information to families regarding student progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact

Ongoing communication and support by school leaders around classroom visits support teachers’ understanding and awareness of expectations around teaching and learning. Communication from school leaders and teachers provides opportunities for families to understand student progress towards meeting standards.

Supporting Evidence

- Frequent classroom observations provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the standard for professionalism, quality instruction, and high expectations. One teacher noted, and all agreed that school leaders conduct both evaluative and non-evaluative observations with feedback. Teachers came to the quick consensus that this process not only holds them accountable, it also builds their instructional capacity. One observation report encouraged the teacher to use questions to deepen student understanding and provided a resource for the teacher. Additionally, a teacher requested that he receive a few observations at the beginning of the school year, in order to implement the feedback and grow. School leaders and teachers stated that professional development time is frequently spent norming different components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

- School leaders consistently provide professional development for teachers around schoolwide expectations. For example, to support the expectation of being culturally responsive and building trust staff participated in a series of workshops. Additionally, staff completed a survey at the end of the series, requesting additional workshops and for school leaders to attend these sessions with them to continue their growth as a community. School leaders also provide staff with a handbook outlining characteristics of effective teachers and instructional expectations. For example, teachers are expected to maintain data binders and conference notes that are used to determine student grouping and instructional adjustment. The handbook also includes components of an effective conference for teachers to use as a model.

- Parents praised the school for the frequency and depth of communication. Families receive monthly progress reports that indicate student performance level and specific comments to support student growth. For example, one progress report suggests the student create vocabulary flashcards with the vocabulary word, definition, and an image. Teachers also use various online platforms to communicate with parents. Parents agreed that the use of online platforms provides them with access to their children’s teachers at all times. One parent shared that the teacher replies to her questions after school hours which allows her to assist her child with homework. Additionally, parent workshops known as coaching families are provided monthly on a variety of topics such as book clubs, understanding the current unit of study in math or ELA, and building self-esteem in children. During some of these workshops, parents are provided with strategies they can use at home. For example, families that attended the grade-two math games workshop were provided with strategies used for place value. Therefore, school leaders and staff consistently communicate and support families understanding of expectations for their children.