Quality Review Report

2017-2018

J.H.S. 123 James M. Kieran
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 08X123
1025 Morrison Avenue
Bronx
NY 10472

Principal: Richard Hallenbeck Jr.

Dates of Review:
May 29, 2018 - May 30, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio
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

J.H.S. 123 James M. Kieran serves students in grade 6 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>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use ongoing assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>Proficient</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>Proficient</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>
<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>Proficient</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>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate their expectations on ensuring all students have daily exposure and provisions to engage in critical thinking. Additionally, school staff communicate high expectations to families on an ongoing basis and offer constant feedback on their children’s progress.

Impact

Continuous training and a system of accountability for staff establish a culture for learning to help them meet schoolwide goals. Parents are aware and understand their children’s progress towards meeting grade-level expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate the schoolwide expectations through administrative memoranda that reinforce the instructional focus on effectively using data to differentiate instruction to provide all students with frequent opportunities to read, think and/or write critically. One memorandum reminds and encourages staff to use their new learning from a recent staff training in using an online intervention and assessment tool to create “strategic groupings based on data.” To support staff in reaching school leaders’ expectations, Monday professional learning sessions are designed to help staff understand the importance of rigor using Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DoK) when planning lessons, using data to drive instruction, and integrating standards-based teaching to foster student engagement. Furthermore, staff members report that individualized coaching support connected to the instructional foci is supportive. Therefore, the use of consistent structures to convey schoolwide expectations and the training provided in support of implementation, promote a culture of learning and high expectations for all staff members.

- Additional instructional memoranda share noticings from yearlong school leader walkthroughs. In one instructional memorandum, the school leader notes some positive and growth area trends based on the quality of the lessons, student discussions and the use of tools for scaffolding. As a result, school leaders implemented a professional learning cycle on developing effective curricula units and lesson planning to incorporate focused essential questions, appropriate scaffolds and purposeful grouping, thus providing support to meet the schoolwide goals and holding teachers accountable for execution. Another source of holding teachers responsible is the use of post-observation feedback lesson debriefs for individual teachers. A group of teachers reported that they have been provided support from these conversations via feedback on how to maintain more effective conference notes, use checklists for self-assessment and how to plan student-centered lessons. Consequently, feedback structures serve to link professional support and accountability to aid all staff members in reaching and sustaining schoolwide expectations.

- Parents reported that they receive ongoing communications from the school to ensure they are aware of the expectations and how they relate to their children’s performance. Some helpful structures, as shared by parents, include the online grading system, ongoing phone calls and individual meetings with staff members. Workshops in English Language Arts (ELA), math and the high school and college process enable parents to understand what is expected and how to both help their children at home to address school-level expectations and to plan for their future. Additionally, parents reported that teachers are supportive in providing extra work, which was noted by a number of parents, as helping their children become more successful in school.
Area of Focus

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

Teacher pedagogy has yet to consistently reflect alignment to the school’s core beliefs on providing access to critical thinking and increasing student engagement to gain mastery of the standards. There is inconsistent use of questioning and other scaffolds as multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Inconsistency in teacher practices reflecting the core beliefs lead to missed opportunities for all learners to develop meaningful work products which demonstrate critical thinking in tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders stated that the instructional foci connect to pedagogical practice on ensuring students have ample access and opportunity to read, think and/or write critically and be exposed to standards-based content to increase student engagement, thus resulting in a strong connection of classroom practice to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Although this core belief was present in some class structures, the level of student engagement and critical thinking varied in others. In an ELA class, students worked on understanding symbols in literature and either choosing or developing one of their own symbols to include it in their own fiction story. A review of student work products reflects that some students had misunderstandings in connecting different symbols and the theme of their story. In other notebooks, some students had difficulty explaining what their visual symbol represented. Similarly, in other classes, including ELA, students’ responses were limited in reflecting standards-based, critical thinking as some products were limited to recall or summary, and therefore not a full representation of the instructional shifts.

- In a science class, student-created questions that were revised for a future experiment were to ensure they were written as testable questions, those that can be answered through hands-on investigation. Some students were provided with sample questions or sentence frames by the teacher to help them reframe their own, while other students were given questions to choose from and use as their own testable question. Although students were provided with sample questions and frames, a review of work products for some students did not reflect the use of analysis or strategic thinking. In a grade six to grade eight bridge class for students with disabilities, students were asked to work in groups or pairs to annotate texts on the geography of ancient Greece. Students reviewed multi-level documents to determine how geographic forces shaped ancient Greek civilizations. Although scaffolds were provided, a review of student work products and discussions reflected little to no engagement as some students’ responses were limited to providing only the effect of the geography on the civilization without much analysis in their verbal and/or written response. Others did not provide a complete response. Overall, the lack of specific directions and questioning for students hinders their ability to demonstrate higher-order thinking.

- In a math class, students worked in groups to apply the Pythagorean Theorem to find the distance between two points in a coordinate system using real world word problems related to determining distance. Although students were asked rigorous questions as part of the task to determine whether their answers were reasonable or accurate, some student responses only reflected yes and no answers, without any explanation or rationale. Similarly, in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) math class, a review of student work products reflected that although students were asked to determine whether their answers were reasonable or accurate, lack of additional further questioning and prompting precluded students from providing a clear rationale for their responses or in some instances, ensure task completion. Overall, teacher practices have yet to consistently convey approaches that emphasize critical thinking.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that the curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, and/or content standards, while making purposeful decisions to integrate specific ELA and math shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills.

Impact

Curricula planning documents contain rigorous tasks that build coherence and promote college and career readiness across grades and subject areas for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Purposeful decisions were made this year to revise the types of tasks in the math curricula to emphasize specific instructional shifts. One sixth-grade unit on statistics consists of activities which contain real-life word problems requiring students to use the study, organize, line up, verify and examine (SOLVE) strategy to unpack the meaning of questions to understand and solve a math concept. Similarly, in an eighth-grade unit on the Pythagorean Theorem, students are using SOLVE to work on tasks around the math concept and its connection to the real world such as asking students to use the Pythagorean Theorem when buying a television or determining the distance between two locations. A review of other math units across the school contain a similar focus on developing deep understanding and application in math and building on previous concepts taught in the prior grade to ensure that there is a deeper focus on these shifts progressing grade-to-grade.

- A review of other units in science, social studies, and ELA reflects a focus on specific ELA shifts relative to text-based answers and writing from sources. In a sixth-grade science unit, several objectives and tasks focus on scientific explanation writing using data. In a sixth-grade social studies unit, students are producing an argumentative essay on the contributions that Greece had on other civilizations. In an eighth-grade ELA unit on writing about reading literary texts, the tasks contain a focus on writing a literary analysis where students are examining the writer’s voice and story structure. Additionally, the task requires students to use evidence from a text to support their claims and provide a rationale for their literary inquiry. Overall, the curricula is planned to build on key standards-based skills and shifts that are scaffolded grade-to-grade.

- Across units and lesson plans, planned tasks highlight reasoning and analysis skills. In a social studies unit on World War II, students are developing an argumentative essay to support their reasoning for whether they believe the United States was justified in dropping the atomic bomb. A review of several math lesson plans, including those planned for students with disabilities, incorporate SOLVE tasks which culminate with questions that ask students to evaluate their responses for accuracy, relevance, and reasonableness. A seventh-grade ELA unit contains tasks which incorporate researching global topics and writing an argumentative essay and develop a claim based on their learning. Similarly, in an eighth-grade unit, assignments require students to analyze the craft and themes in literature to produce argumentative essays which include counterarguments using details from the text to support their position. Thus, planned activities include rigor and emphasize critical thinking across the curricula.
### Additional Finding

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

Teachers use rubrics, a grading policy, and common assessments, including online diagnostic data, to determine the progress of students towards meeting goals aligned to the school’s curricula, across grades and subject areas.

**Impact**

Students receive actionable feedback regarding their achievement. Teachers use data from common assessments to make curricular and instructional adjustments in efforts to increase student progress towards schoolwide goals.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers use curricula-aligned rubrics and checklists to gauge how students are performing across subject areas. During an interview, students shared how rubrics help them know whether they are achieving, based on their level of performance ranging from level one to four, and what next steps to take to improve their grade. Additionally, students were able to clearly articulate the grading policy which consists of 40 percent assessments and projects, 30 percent classroom work, 20 percent discussion and participation and 10 percent for homework. Students stated that as they obtain their grades, they are able to gauge how well they are performing using the grading policy, which taken together with subject-area rubrics, ensures that students are aware of the grading criteria, and then use these tools along with feedback to strive for higher grades.

- A review of student work folders, portfolios, and bulletin boards reflects feedback with comments containing next steps to help students determine which areas to focus on in order to improve their grades. One student shared her grade and teacher’s feedback which stated she needed to write a stronger lead in her essay. The student noted that her teacher suggested that she consider using different questions to hook the reader into the topic. Another student shared his next steps which was to use more transition words and provided a list with choices. Similarly, another student had the same area of improvement and stated, “I need to work on using more complex transitional words like furthermore versus using then.” The student continued to state how her teacher provided her with a list of more complex words to use in future writing pieces. Overall, ongoing and specific comments with next steps aid students in improving their work.

- Benchmark assessments are conducted in ELA and math using online diagnostic assessment systems, and for other subjects teachers rely on end-of-unit exams. Based on student performance, small groups are created to reteach concepts not mastered. In science, eighth-grade teachers determined that identifying independent variables was a growth area and created small instructional groups to reteach the concepts. This adjustment led to 85 percent of students performing on or approaching grade-level in this skill, an increase from the beginning of the year where the rate was at 48 percent. In ELA, teachers conducted a baseline assessment on argumentative writing and noticed that 100 percent of the transitional seventh-grade English Language Learners (ELLs) were writing responses with little volume and analysis. Teachers revamped their instruction and introduced a new speak-write protocol. The implementation of this instructional adjustment led to an increase in the volume and quality of writing, where 60 percent of the students improved their score on the post assessment. A review of data from other subject areas reflects that the use of similar practices have led to increases in student progress on benchmark assessments.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

School leaders provide feedback from frequent cycles of observation to all teachers and articulate strengths and next steps aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and that are consistent with the schoolwide instructional goals.

Impact

An ongoing system of observation and effective feedback supports elevated instructional practices and increased professional reflection and growth.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently review documentation and data from their observation cycles to ensure teachers are receiving feedback in a timely manner, and they maintain a tracker to support them with scheduling. In several reports, feedback contains implementation timelines noting that school leaders will be circling back to ensure suggested strategies are put into effect. Feedback is provided both verbally and in writing, and as indicated in teacher feedback reports, there are priorities for one to two areas to further leverage support and focus on specific next steps. In a post-observation report, the school leader prioritized feedback in the areas of designing coherent instruction and student engagement and explained how planning with a focus on these components would further build on other domains in the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Subsequently, there was an increased rating in the ensuing observation, thus further strengthening the teacher’s growth towards implementing more effective practices.

- A review of written feedback contains strengths and next steps which include areas of improvement with suggestions. Both strengths and next steps are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching to support teachers’ efforts to implement high-quality instructional practices. One observation contains feedback connected to questioning and discussion where the school leader suggests to begin each class with a motivating activity using a discussion prompt from previous studies or current events. To encourage student-to-student discussion, the school leader suggests the use of a discussion ball as an entry point. In another post-observation report, the school leader encourages the teacher to refrain from restating student answers and adding details to them in order to hold the student more accountable for elaborating on their own answers. The school leader provides two texts which contain strategies to support the teacher’s growth in this area. During the subsequent lesson, the teacher was observed asking more rigorous questions and encouraging students to support their answers with a clear rationale and evidence from the text. Overall, feedback supports teacher reflection and promotes high-quality instructional practices.

- Post-observation reports reflect feedback connected to the schoolwide goals and instructional foci of the school on increasing the quality of assessment-based instruction and student engagement. Across several post-observation reports, school leaders provide feedback on using data to group students and differentiate tasks in order to foster increased levels of student engagement. One suggestion toward more highly effective practices is to allow students to facilitate their own conversations, explain their own thinking to their peers, and further challenge each other. Additionally, to promote more self-assessment, school leaders propose the use of several formative assessment strategies such as the red, yellow, and green light system. Overall, feedback provides clarity on instructional expectations and supports teacher growth and reflection.
## 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 teams which incorporate data-based rounds of inquiry. Structures are in place to support distributive leadership across teams.

### Impact

Teacher teams are building instructional capacity which promotes growth in meeting the school’s achievement goals and the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers’ input strengthens their leadership capacity and affects student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly in department teams to review student work and data, determine areas of need, reflect, and plan next steps for either small group instruction or to implement new strategies for specific groups of students. Additionally, all teacher teams review student work and data with a lens to ensure students are increasing the school’s ELA and math proficiency rates, which connects to the school’s achievement goals. A set of social studies meeting notes reflects teachers reviewing trends in their data, and based on the quality of their responses determined that one group of students need to work on identifying the relationship between fact and opinion, while others need more background knowledge on the topic related to the task. In one meeting, teachers reported that from their review of student work they have discovered the need to break standard-based lessons into smaller parts. Additionally, teachers stated they have learned the value in using wait time and discussion to help students build upon and expand their ideas, especially prior to producing argumentative writing. Therefore, the sharing of best practice helps increase the quality of instruction and use of differentiated strategies in support of the school’s instructional focus.

- During an ELA team meeting, teachers grouped themselves by grade level to review students’ use of elaboration in their writing. The seventh-grade team noticed that students who struggled with the task had difficulty understanding the theme which led to gaps in their writing. Teachers opted to reteach the concept, yet stated they would use more explicit modeling to ensure students are capturing details that would help them connect with the theme. Other grade-level groups shared strategies in support of enhancing the quality of writing including the use of exemplars to provide students with models of standards-based writing, incorporating graphic organizers and building in protocols for student discussion to help them with elaborating their ideas. Thus, teacher teams are working collaboratively to meet schoolwide academic goals.

- Teacher teams work in tandem with the instructional cabinet to make revisions to structures or protocols in support of increasing student learning outcomes. Instructional teams voiced the need for flexibility in mini lesson timing to allow for proper scaffolding when teaching critical thinking skills as part of the school’s instructional focus. Additionally, based on teacher input, the social studies department has decided to partner with an outside arts organization. Through this partnership, this team has worked on using visual arts and station teaching in their classes. Teachers report that students are engaging with higher levels of interest in history through project-based action research projects thus promoting more student-centered approaches in classes.