Quality Review Report

2017-2018

The Walton Avenue School
Elementary 09X294
1425 Walton Avenue
Bronx
NY 10452

Principal: Daniel Russo

Dates of Review:
December 4, 2017 - December 5, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Buffie Whitfield
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

The Walton Avenue School 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>
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</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>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>Area of Focus</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>
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### School Quality Ratings continued

#### School Culture

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

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meaningful student work products</td>
<td></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>Area of Celebration</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>
</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>
Findings

Feedback to teachers through cycles of observations, and informal conversations accurately captures strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders also have a strategic, transparent system for managing professional development, and make informed decisions with succession plans about staff.

Impact

School leaders strategically use data from observations and the Danielson Framework to provide meaningful feedback to teachers and foster professional growth, thus leading to improved teaching practice.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teacher leaders calibrate their expectations while visiting classrooms, using the Danielson Framework to assess all competencies. Teacher leaders observe teachers in one department and then provide individual and department feedback to surface gaps in teaching. For example, in one observation report the principal commented on the need for students to develop the skills to engage in conversations. Comments such as, “Next step in our work together is to update reading levels and sight word assessments; and look at data to determine appropriate reading groups.” During the team meetings, teachers shared that they are also encouraged to seek support from teacher leaders who have provided clear instructional expectations for an integral part of the feedback loop. These strategic and collaborative endeavors strengthen teacher practice and alignment of individual professional goals for teachers resulting in their improved levels of effectiveness across instruction evaluated by observations to date.

- Improvements in the quality of instruction are informed through an apparent process by which teachers establish personal goals based on a list of professional practices they want to develop, which are reviewed during observations and coaching sessions. Teachers professional development goals are guided by several factors, including, input from administrators, teacher leaders and coaches. For example, many teachers addressed the need to improve the implementation of thinking maps within their lessons. Additionally, school leaders have made decisions to support learning opportunities for teachers leading to more authentic teaching through “Five Practices for Orchestrating Productive Math Discussions.” Teachers shared and appreciate that administrators create professional development series based on their goals and application to guide their learning when making succession plans. One teacher stated, “I have seen improvement in the quality of math discussion in my classes and my peers based on participating in professional development cycles.

- Administrators give detailed feedback to teachers, capturing their strengths and indicating support with suggested examples for their instructional growth. During meetings, teachers stated that feedback is clear and purposeful with concrete examples for improvement, such as providing professional reading from National Council of Teachers Mathematics resulting in math teachers looking at student work as a vehicle for discussions. Teachers select their own professional goals after reflecting on their practice and having conversations with teacher leaders. Through ongoing focused observations and follow-up support, supervisors have developed a cycle of continual improvement where feedback provide opportunities for teachers to grow through observing best practices by intervisitation and providing literacy and math coaching to ensure the consistency of teacher development and practice. In meetings with teams, teachers expressed that they are more confident in their teaching as a result of transparency around the classroom observation process and feedback from teacher leaders focused on improving their instructional practice.
Area of Focus

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

Across classrooms teaching strategies including questioning and scaffolds consistently provide multiple entry points so that students’ work products and discussion reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

Impact

While teachers are providing multiple entry points into the curricula with challenging tasks to support the engagement of all students in higher levels of thinking and participation, in the vast majority of classrooms, this practice has not yet resulted in ownership for all students. Furthermore, in some classes, high quality supports and extensions are not fully implemented.

Supporting Evidence

- Instruction are centered on providing students with opportunities to think deeply about their work and reflect on their progress, as they make their thinking visible through discussions. Across classrooms, teachers used supports, such as chart paper, problem solving strategy cards, manipulatives and writing anchor charts. All students were engaged in the writing task, made their thinking visible in their interactions, and written work. In a class that had students with disabilities, students answered questions in their math workbooks. The teacher modeled for students that had difficulties with their problems. The teacher asked improper questions such as, “4x2 = what?” “By what?” “Times what?” “Ten by what?” “X= what?” Additionally, the teacher did not refer to math vocabulary to explain keys terms. Although document readers, SmartBoard and visual aids were available, the teacher did not refer to resources to support the learning of the students.

- Student work products demonstrated higher-order thinking skills. During lessons, most teachers allocate time to confer with students in a one-on-one or group setting and are aware of each student’s level of understanding and participation. This awareness informs how teachers differentiate instruction for each child and was demonstrated in an English as a New Language (ENL) class. The teacher created different graphic organizers to engage students in how characters’ actions contribute to the events, plots, and theme in text. Furthermore, the teacher supported students in their native language by using cognates, sentence frames, and illustrations. Thus, all students observed were engaged and made their thinking visible through their interactions with peers and teachers.

- During student discussions, teachers engaged students in accountable talk and collaboration activities in most classrooms observed, but few involved the students sitting in groups; instead, they work independently. In a math lesson, the teacher circulated about the room, engaged students in critical thinking skills and promoted discussions. The teacher pushed students to think about different approaches to solve their math problems. However, this encouragement for students to take ownership over their own approaches to problem solving and learning was not present in the vast majority of classrooms.
Findings

Students benefit from curricula that are rigorous, emphasize higher order thinking, and are continuously refined using student work and data throughout the school year.

Impact

Refinements have ensured that all students across grades and subjects have access to the curriculum, are cognitively engaged, and can demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricular documents demonstrates a selection of varied complex texts that require students to use close reading to answer rigorous questions requiring synthesis, analysis, and problem solving. Common Core-aligned curricular maps outline teacher-created units of study and are evident across grades, content areas, and the integration. For example, a grade four English Language Arts (ELA) map includes content, skills, assessments, classifying and sequencing, and annotating and paraphrasing a text. Skills increase in rigor as the year progresses from unit to unit. Mid-year, students are expected to determine importance and understand text structure, and by the close of the year to determine validity and evaluate evidence. The module also includes performance-based and summative assessments, a culminating performance-based assessment, a student checklist, as well as scaffolds, adjustments, anticipated misconceptions, extensions, and resources for vocabulary, text-dependent questions, and literature circles.

- ELA units have been refined and reflect alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) Shifts, including but not limited to the following: Balancing Informational and Literary Texts, Exposure to the Staircase of Complexity and Knowledge in the Disciplines. Revisions of curriculum and lessons are made based on the analysis of student work and formative assessment data. Teachers systematically use protocols for looking at student work, and determine mastery of concepts for each unit of study. Revisions are then made to the curriculum to address the gaps in student learning that have been revealed. They have included changes in sequence of topics, additional lessons for re-teaching within the units, and the selection of appropriately challenging materials to support student learning. For example, grade three through five teacher teams worked to develop a meaningful shared reading curriculum. Teachers recognized the need to reduce the amount of text, hone in on theme or character change, and include one to three multiple-choice questions with each text, resulting in a steady increase of student achievement on the New York State ELA exam. Similarly, in kindergarten through grade two math, teachers refined games and mini-lessons resulting in teachers developing unit frameworks for all units of study using the Universal Backward Design model resulting in increased percentage of Levels 3 and 4 on the NYS ELA examinations.

- In Math, discussion is rooted in Problems of the Day, which incorporates the following shifts - Deep Understanding and Application. Teacher teams revise curricula using student work and data. For example, teachers decided to begin with topic eight – Use Strategies and Properties to add and subtract, then move into topic 1 – Understand Multiplication and Division of Whole Numbers. Teachers reviewed June data and determined that assessment scores trended lower that the years prior. Because of moving these units to begin earlier during the year has resulted with students mastering the prerequisite skills of multiplication and division. Across subjects and grades, teachers modified the curriculum to incorporate thinking maps, which supports this year’s instructional focus - Making Thinking Visible. In ELA, the teacher team ensure that students spend an equal amount of time on each grade level reading fiction and nonfiction texts. Early childhood units are paired together to reflect a common theme that is illustrated in the fiction and nonfiction texts. In the upper grades, students spend longer periods of time in novels and research projects resulting in increased language proficiency on NYSESLAT for all English Language Learners (ELLs).
Additional Finding

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

Teachers create assessments and use rubrics aligned to the school curricula to provide students and parents with actionable feedback. Data from student work products is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

**Impact**

Using teacher actionable feedback, students are cognizant of the next steps to improve their work and student data is used to determine student progress.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Across classrooms, teachers use various assessments, such as *Fountas and Pinnell* running records, benchmark assessments, conference notes, checklists, behavioral data and rubrics. Teachers administer running records to assess student fluency and comprehension of fiction. Additionally, Spanish *Fountas and Pinnell* running records is administered to identify access points in the native language to support second language acquisition. Data is used to determine strategic groups, refine whole class instruction and determine student need for additional instructional support. Teachers continuously refine rubrics to strengthen connections to standards, content, and communication of next steps.

- Rubrics accompany assessments and tasks, and are used to ensure that expectations for student work are clearly defined, skills and progress toward proficiency are measurable, and teachers track student growth over time. Students said that feedback helps them know what to do in ELA and math and their next steps. One student shared that the task rubrics "show us what we need to do to get a better grade." Teachers’ actionable feedback aligned to the rubric was evident on student work. Additionally, students were able to articulate what they need to do to improve their writing that included working on a conclusion, and including a counterclaim and evidence for support. Students shared that rubrics are often used in ELA and math not as much in other subjects. Classroom visits and meetings with teachers and students revealed that feedback on student work includes next steps. Teachers were observed conferring with students and providing them with strategies for improvement. During the student meeting, students shared work products that included rubrics and teacher feedback.

- Teachers utilize item analysis and disaggregated data to identify learning gaps, trends and patterns. Analyzed test scores of specific subgroups of students has enabled teachers to pinpoint the level of which standards have been mastered and which group of students require re-teaching, remediation, and enrichment resulting in an increase of Level 3 and 4 on NYS ELA and math in 2017. In 2016, Level 3 and 4 increased in ELA from 49 percent in 2016 to 60 percent in 2017. Similarly, in 2017, Level 3 and 4 increased in math from 53 percent in 2016 to 77 percent in 2017.
### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations of the Danielson’s Framework for Teaching to staff and successfully partner with families to communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness.

### Impact

School leaders’ focus on cultivating rigor and college readiness has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability for all school community members including a successful partnership with parents that support student progress towards expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- A strong culture of high expectations is promoted by all staff to prepare students for a better future. This is evidenced by high levels of expectations for all staff throughout the community via workshops, staff handbook, website, peer-visitations, progress reports, orientations that emulate a culture where accountability is reciprocal between all stakeholders. Frequent cycles of observations with the completion of the teacher self-reflection tool intended to support teachers in celebrating growth and strengthening practice hold staff accountable for meeting expectations for pedagogical practice. Teachers advise and hold each other accountable through the regularly scheduled team meetings and intervisitations where teachers work together to refine pedagogical practices via demo lessons and co-planning opportunities. Communication of high expectations to all stakeholders keeps PS 294 moving on an upward trajectory. A weekly newsletter known as The Walton Weekly is distributed to all stakeholders, outlines the upcoming events for the week, what topics are to be covered in each subject area by grade, the current Book of the Month title, and prompts by grade, as well as school environment notes and logistical items for a smooth week.

- The parent community at The Walton School receives tiered support. The most popular parent event is Coffee Friday with the principal, held the first Friday of each month. Parents from all grades and subgroups come to have coffee and hear about upcoming events; there is always an instructional component introduced as well. All parent meetings are well attended; one month parents worked in groups to unpack the results of the Learning Environment Survey and another month parents used thinking maps to sequence the steps of cooking a healthy family dinner. For parents, who want a deeper look into how their children learn, Parent Instructional Rounds are held once monthly during which time parents receive a short workshop on one subject area and then visit two or three classrooms, including their respective child’s classroom, in teams then a focused debrief. At another well-attended parent meeting, with over thirty parents, parents shared they effectively partnered with the school as learners resulting in assisting their children at home in guided reading, math discussion, book clubs, and unpacking thinking maps.

- Parents shared that school leaders use various methods such as phone calls, newsletters and publishing parties as vehicles for communicating high expectations. Kindergarten parents share they recently attended their children’s opinion writing of their favorite animal. Parents said that the biggest impact has been workshops the workshops for them. Parents shared that he now understood ELA and math as a result attending workshops and that they could follow up at home. Many parents agreed that workshops have helped them understand the Common Core and school expectations better than other school’s workshops visited previously for other family members. Parents echo that the school collaborates with them in supporting their children’s achievement.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<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

The vast majority of teacher teams are engaged in structured professional collaborations and regularly analyze student work through an inquiry approach. Teachers benefit from a variety of distributed leadership opportunities to research effective instructional techniques and play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning.

Impact

Teacher team collaboration builds distributed leadership capacity and strengthens the instructional capacity of teachers resulting in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- During the teacher meetings observed, there was a well-developed culture of collaboration and collegial work. The teams evaluated student work and revised units, lessons, and instructional approaches based on assessment data. Teachers also discussed the progress of individual students with the goal of working together to share ideas and best practices to continually improve student learning. As a common practice, teams conduct cycles of inquiry where they establish a question, theory, action, data to be collected, and a focus group of students. Following data analysis, teachers determine their next steps. To create a unified inquiry team, teachers began with a deep look at a variety of math assessments. Teachers stated that because of meeting regularly and the structure of their team meetings they have seen growth in their own planning, specifically in the alignment of curricula and instruction to the instructional shifts and Common Core Learning Standards, and in the areas of differentiation and introducing the Five Math Practices.

- In grade-level teams, teachers plan, utilizing a common planning debrief form that includes a focused agenda, captures next steps, and includes a timeline for the work to be completed. Follow-up meetings begin with a discussion of next steps from the prior meeting, resulting in modifications to mapping and lesson delivery. Additional to the instructional team, the School Implementation Team create action plans for struggling students, and follow-up supports to ensure the proper supports are implemented. Teachers shared that they use their meeting time to discuss students in need of intervention. The team looked at data in the form of a behavior intervention plan, case studies, and anecdotes, to uncover trends. For example, a teacher shared about a student that had done well behaviorally at the beginning of the school year; however, issues surfaced that directly impacted their academic achievement. The team brainstormed ideas on how to support the student, which has resulted in student improvement in their classes.

- Teachers stated that leadership structures have led to thoughtful involvement in school matters. The teachers share responsibilities including facilitating planning in their particular content area and act as liaisons with administration in regards to communication and record keeping. The writing of the monthly newsletter is shared by all teachers in the grade. Moreover, teachers play a vital role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. Teachers freely created an Implementation Design Team, which developed a 12-week plan. Teachers also openly engage in lesson studies amongst peers that highlight their instructional focus of Making Thinking Visible. A teacher stated, “We initiate our lesson study to improve our students’ outcomes. We are very lucky that we all have adopted this vision.”