Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Mott Hall Community School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 08X467

650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465

Principal: Benjamin Basile

Dates of Review:
October 23, 2017 - October 24, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Jorge Estrella
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

Mott Hall Community School 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>
</tr>
</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</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 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>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

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

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

## Systems for Improvement

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

<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>Additional Finding</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>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

The school’s approach to culture building, discipline, and social-emotional support are informed by a theory of action, a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS), and a Mood Meter, which complement the guidance structures across the school.

Impact

Student council involvement in decision-making supports school improvement efforts that result in a safe environment and inclusive culture. All students are known well by more than one adult who helps personalize attendance supports and coordinate social-emotional learning, and guidance supports.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s theory of action is based on a dynamic and supportive environment where faculty, staff, and students effectively promote a community that ensures the academic and behavioral achievement for all learners, resulting in a safe and welcoming tone, evidenced by students’ behavior and mutual respect toward each other as well as the adults. The school addresses the social-emotional needs of the students through its incentivized PBIS program that is grounded in the tenets of respect, organization, attendance, and responsibility (R.O.A.R.). Monthly assemblies laud academic achievement and student behavior. As a result of these efforts, the school was removed in 2015 from the New York City persistently dangerous list, as well as showing an eleven percent decrease in the total number of suspensions and incidents indicated in the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS) comparing year to date to 2016-2017.

- The school has a student council that includes student representatives selected from each class via student elections that meets bi-monthly with the student support team. Students’ needs, concerns, and planning schoolwide activities are discussed to help improve the learning environment of the school. The student council participated in the design of the school yard, the implementation of a new computer lab, expanding uniform choices, and planning instructional field trips in collaboration with teachers. Social studies and Spanish lessons incorporate current issues that concern the diversity of the school community such as discussions about the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (Dream Act), through the arts and research. Guidance counselors organize tours to international high schools for English Language Learners (ELLs) to advance their learning.

- Students reported that if they have any issues, concerns, or conflicts, they seek out any member of the school staff. Parents confirmed this and noted the school is proactive in taking care of issues timely and effectively in reporting concerns about their children. In case of any incident, parents are immediately notified by telephone call, online platform, and text message. Proper steps are taken to address the social emotional need of the students, such as teachers’ one-on-one support, guidance sessions for at-risk students, engaging students in extracurricular activities and strategic groupings. As a result, student and adult interactions in class and during transitions set the tone for a quality teaching and learning environment.

- The guidance team, in collaboration with teachers implemented the recognizing emotions in one’s self and others, understanding the causes and consequences of emotions, labeling emotions using vocabulary, expressing emotions in socially appropriate ways, and regulating emotions effectively (RULER) using a Mood Meter. The Mood Meter identifies feelings in order to build self and social awareness to develop a social emotional vocabulary. The attendance team reviews and monitors trends in attendance data on a weekly basis, resulting in interventions to support at-risk students. The school sustains an attendance rate year to date of 93.7 percent as of October 2017.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator:  | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Developing |

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are inconsistently providing multiple entry points into the curricula which is evident in student work products and discussions.

Impact

Small group and partner learning are evident across classrooms. However, the inconsistent multiple entry points into the curricula and teacher dominated approach lead to uneven levels of student engagement at a high level, thus limiting opportunities for them to engage in higher-order thinking tasks that demonstrates ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, there were inconsistencies in the use of scaffolds and student grouping to provide entry points into the lesson. In some classes there was purposeful differentiation in the grouping of students, there was a grade six science class where students in groups engaged in conversations about the parts of cells and its functions, all supported by video clips, translations, and manipulatives. In other classes, there was whole group teaching, or scaffolds that were not used to maximum benefit. For example, in a grade seven social studies Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, there were no differentiated supports as students engaged in a task involving the new and old world. Although there were two teachers in this classroom, their interactions with students did not promote students' engagement in challenging tasks.

- In most classrooms, lessons were teacher dominated and prevented students from being highly engaged, for students were compliant in completing the work. Interactions was teacher-student-teacher, and provided few opportunities to engage students in discussions or push students to elaborate in their responses. In some instances, teachers posed questions and accepted choral responses without knowing whether or not students understood the content or the teacher would answer his/her own questions.

- In alignment with the school's instructional focus "engaging all learners in authentic, meaningful and thought provoking discussions, to increase student engagement, expand critical thinking, deepen understanding of new content, and sharpen argumentative, expository, narrative, and poetic written expressions." The foreign language teacher effectively facilitated a Spanish lesson, where students engaged in a Socratic seminar activity discussion about the effect of DACA and the Dream Act. The teacher facilitated the session by posing provoking questions and encouraging students to initiate debates on their points of view, using arguments based on text evidence. However, this type of practice has yet to be implemented across the school, where in most cases students were seated in groups but had limited opportunities to engage in productive conversations.

- In the classrooms that reflected group-seating arrangements, there were few opportunities for students to have conversations. Students typically worked on the same task while most teachers did not provide differentiated activities for all learners. For example, in a grade eight math class, students were working on translations, using differentiated worksheets, and regrouped every four minutes. During this process, the teacher visited all groups and provided support when needed. Similarly in a grade eight English Language Arts (ELA) class the teacher promoted student discussions regarding dystopian fiction. These types of dynamics were not observed in other classrooms, where several students remained unengaged and quiet throughout the lesson.
Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum
Rating: Developing

Findings
School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and integrating the instructional shifts. Academic tasks with higher-order thinking skills were planned inconsistently across classrooms.

Impact
Teachers have been engaged in instructional planning across grades and subject levels, and have received one-on-one support from coaches; however, limited access to curricula and academic tasks for all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, lessens opportunities to promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence
- The principal shared that the Mott Hall Community School adopted the Common Core Learning Standards to designing curricula and lesson plans. A review of instructional planning documents revealed that across all content areas, units of study are integrating the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Instructional planning documents revealed that teachers are beginning to use explicit teaching in their planning to engage students in multistep problem solving, argumentative writing, text-based response, and content specific vocabulary.

- Units of study across all content areas are beginning to build coherence in the development of how tasks are being planned to allow students to demonstrate learning. For instance, across grade levels teachers are using a method for math instruction study the problem, organize the facts, line-up a plan, verify the plan with action, and examine the results (S.O.L.V.E.). During the meeting with students, they articulated how this method enhanced their ability to improve their performance in math by having specific steps such as study the problem, organize the facts, line up a plan and apply the solution, verify the plan with action and examine the results.

- Although faculty members have been engaged in several professional learning activities around instructional planning, some planning documents are yet to incorporate academic tasks with multiple access points and scaffolds to meet the needs of all learners. For example, in a science lesson plan, the teacher incorporated video clips around cell parts and functions. The same lesson incorporates translated documents, manipulatives, and targeted groupings for ELLs this level of planning is yet to be implemented across all content areas.

- School leaders shared that units of study incorporate the Common Core Learning Standards and focus on increasing higher-order thinking skills across content areas. However, there is inconsistency in planning for higher-order thinking skills in academic tasks across the grades and subjects. For example, instructional documents revealed just a list of learning targets for each unit of study. However, there is no indication of academic tasks emphasizing higher-order skills to achieve these targets.

- Questioning and tasks on some lesson plans are aligned to the Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level three. For example, an eighth grade ELA lesson stated, “What if the government banned all technology? An eighth grade science lesson plan stated, “Based on your graph, in what year will the population reach eight billion?” However, in other lesson plans, DOK levels remained in the lower range. A science lesson asked students to observe tools and name them, in a lesson plan for a fourth grade math class, the task required all students to draw a diagram to solve comparison problems with addition and subtraction, regardless of ability level.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Teachers use assessments and rubrics that provide limited feedback to students. The implementation of effective assessment practices such as ongoing checks for understanding were not observed across the majority of classrooms visited.

Impact

The quality of feedback and the assessment practices inconsistently ensure that all students are being made aware of the next learning steps needed to increase mastery of all content standards. The limited use of checks for understanding during instruction results in uneven adjustments to meet student-learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders indicate that teachers use checklists, rubrics, one-to-one conferencing, and verbal feedback to give curricula-aligned, actionable feedback to students. However, classroom observations and review of student work products informs inconsistent practices of providing actionable feedback with next steps to students. In some of the student work shared by students and on hallways bulletin boards, some actionable feedback is provided, such as “Excellent job! Remember to break up your paragraphs” and “Try to be more specific in your plan and always write your answer in a complete sentence.” But in most classrooms, student work in portfolios were not available. Limited feedback to students were grades, highlighted rubrics, stamps, or no feedback. The lack of effective, actionable feedback prevents students, based on their individual needs, from knowing what is required of them, or how to improve performance on learning tasks.

- Students reported that rubrics are not always used across subjects. They said, “We mostly use rubrics in ELA, math and social studies.” Some students explained why they were using rubrics, while others had difficulties articulating the purpose of using rubrics. Most of the work presented by students did not have rubrics attached, or were used infrequently during classroom visits.

- During the small group student meeting, only three students were able to articulate clear next steps for improvement based on feedback received from their teachers. When students were asked how do they know what to do to improve their work or to get higher grades, three students struggled and were unable delineate the steps needed to improve their work. Some students were unable to read the feedback provided by the teacher because it was illegible. Another student stated that she is aware of her performance on her work because the teacher offers her feedback. Another student stated that he knows he is doing well in mathematics when he accesses his grades on the online platform. Other students remained quiet and were unable to present work for all content areas.

- While students in a grade six ELA lesson were working independently on their essays, the teacher was conferencing with the groups. Once the teacher noticed a pattern of errors or a misunderstanding of the task, she asked students to “freeze” and provided further directions or conducted a reteach to remedy the misunderstanding. The teacher recorded the students' responses in her formative assessment tool. Similarly in a grade eight math class, the teacher conferenced with groups and individual students, provided feedback, and retaught the students who were unclear in solving their translations. This practice is yet to be implemented in other classrooms visited. Three teachers effectively implemented checks for understanding and made adjustments to the lessons, but only one teacher recorded the students' responses. The majority of the teachers did not have any assessment tools to record students' responses. The inconsistent practice of using checks for understanding to adjust lessons “on-the-spot” hampers teachers’ ability to support all students' learning needs.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Proficient |

**Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and provide professional development opportunities to staff. Furthermore, teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

**Impact**

Supportive structures reinforce a culture of high expectations for teaching and learning; thus, the school community are aware of schoolwide instructional expectations that ensures that all students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level by taking high school classes.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders shared documents such as the faculty handbook, professional development calendar, principal’s weekly newsletter, lesson plan template, and classroom environment checklists that illustrate high expectations aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, that are all shared with the staff. The faculty handbook articulates the core instructional philosophy, the instructional expectations including the workshop model configuration, lesson planning, and assessment. Teachers state that school leaders holds them accountable to ensuring high expectations through their observations and review their grades posted using the online grading system. Through observations teachers receive feedback on instructional practices. For example, “Employ anchors and/or exemplars for students as models to help guide them in the process of thoughts garnered through discussion that then lead to independent written artifacts.”

- School leaders have provided professional learning opportunities to support teachers in designing coherent instruction, techniques for student engagement, and classroom management rooted in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to make explicit the expectations for teaching and learning and attributes of effective instructional practice. The instructional team works with the district Teacher Development and Evaluation Coach and external consultants to facilitate cycles of professional learning, as evidenced by the professional learning plan. These sessions are designed based on teacher need as per feedback from observations for example, lesson planning workshop, and strategies to make real-world connections, assertive discipline and the behavior management. The implementation of these professional learning sessions are followed with frequent classroom observations with actionable feedback, as well as group and individual supports to ensure that teachers are working toward the schoolwide achievement goals.

- School leaders, and staff are in on-going communication with families and students regarding requirements for high school applications through workshops, high school fairs, high school visits, and individual conferences. Students participated in the high school fair hosted in their building in October 2017, where they had opportunities to interact with high schools staff. Students were well versed in the high school articulation process, felt well supported by school staff, as well as prepared for the next step. In addition, there are thirty grade eight students enrolled in Common Core Algebra I and the Living Environment Regents classes. The passing rate for the school year 2016-2017 was 89.3 percent in the Common Core Algebra I Regents and 79.2 percent in Living Environment Regents classes.

- Students stated that the school prepares them for college through solving math problems as teachers ask them to explain their thinking using the SOLVE method. Additionally, students reported that in addition to the regular instructional support they receive in classrooms, they also have afterschool opportunities to connect the Common Core to real life experiences in small group settings. Thus, there is an improvement in student proficiency in ELA and math New York State tests when comparing 2016 to 2017 results. In ELA, there is a nine percentage point gains and in Math six percentage point gains from six percent to twelve percent.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development
Rating: Developing

Findings
While all teachers engage weekly teams for professional collaborations across grades and content areas, their work is unevenly connected to the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards the instructional shifts, and the analysis of assessment data and student work.

Impact
The use of protocols to memorialize inquiry team sessions is developing across the teams, as this work is yet to result in improved teacher practice or progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders shared that all teachers participate in teacher team meetings focused on grade and subject levels to look at student work and student data, and identify patterns and trends to further discuss and design instructional next steps. This has enabled teachers to engage in peer feedback, share best practices, and individualize instruction to meet students’ needs. Reviewed meeting documents informed that teachers are yet to effectively engage in a team effort to promote the achievement of the school goals and the implementation of the Common Core. Documents presented revealed uneven work on curricula and instructional shifts. For example, the math team discusses and prepare action plans to have students deep conceptual understanding of math in a real-world context. But, in other subjects there are references to the instructional shifts lacking specific detailed next steps to improve student learning.

- Teachers shared that during teacher team meetings, they provide input about teacher practice. Yet, reviewed minutes from teacher team meetings indicate inconsistent levels recommendations that may fully impact teachers’ instructional capacity. For example, a next step identified in math indicated that teachers will use a timer daily to keep the flow of lesson and to make time for closure/exit slip ticket continue integer lessons incorporating multiple representations of concepts. Other reviewed math documents present similar detailed next steps. However, in other content areas, the next steps were vague or just referred to logistics such as planning to come up with next steps to support students or just naming unit task for grade seven but no instructional outcomes. Some of the documents reviewed did not have minutes or planning next steps.

- In the observed inquiry team meeting, math teachers used the ten “quick” steps for collaborative student inquiry protocol, to determine students’ understanding of the concept of a unit rate. Teachers used student work pieces to discuss demonstrated student knowledge and skills, as well as identified gaps. A discussion of effective teaching strategies ensued and addressed the needs of the students as well as interventions such as, “Using similar type of do now problems, using specific language, breaking down the problem, and next steps.” Teachers shared that, “The school is in the emerging stages to fully implementing the inquiry process.” In math, the work they are currently doing will enable them to track students over time moving into next year.

- The review of ELA, science, and social studies inquiry-based documents revealed that there is an inconsistent use of student data or analysis of student work to determine the specific learning needs of group of students and the specific instructional next steps to improve teaching practice. Other than the math department, there was limited information offered to determine the quality of consistency and coherence to engage in inquiry work across content areas. In the ELA department, the analysis of the on demand performance assessment for writing, determines that most grade six students were able to formulate leads to engage readers and need to improve in adding descriptive details to create vivid picture of the story. However, instructional next steps to address the instructional needs were not evident in the documents presented.