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

Pelham Gardens Middle 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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
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</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>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>
</table>
### School Quality Ratings continued

#### School Culture

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

<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>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>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>Well Developed</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Area of Celebration**

**Quality Indicator:** 1.4 Positive Learning Environment  
**Rating:** Well Developed

**Findings**

Through the school’s theory of action aligned to their core values, school leaders and teachers create an environment of discipline, safety, and emotional support. Structures such as advisories, an attendance team, and partnerships with organizations ensure that each student is known well and receives personalized support.

**Impact**

As a result of a safe and inclusive school culture and structures to support student learning and personal development, students are adopting effective academic and personal behaviors.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The school maintains a supportive learning environment and has high expectations for learning and behavior that are shared with parents and students. These high expectations for learning, behavior, and attendance result in continuous learning and personal growth by students and staff. The school’s theory of action around school culture is based on collaboration, reflection, advocacy, friendship, and thinking, which was designed by teachers and school leaders to support a quality school culture. This culture builds capacity among all stakeholders to create a positive climate of excellence and high expectations that prepare, motivate, and inspire all students, with emphasis on African-American and Hispanic males. This is supported by a positive reward system used across grades, with monthly grade-level assemblies which are held to acknowledge and reward individual student academic achievement, progress, growth, and exemplification of character and core values. As a result, the Online Occurrence Reporting System (ORRS) report data shows a reduction of incidents in classrooms and common areas, comparing data from SY 2017 to 2018.

- Each class elected two students to represent their class as advocates, playing a meaningful role during the school day. Advocates are responsible for modeling social and behavioral expectations, routinely facilitating student-led discussions in afternoon advisory sessions, reviewing daily homework assignments with students, and distributing home-school communication notices and letters. They also greet guests and inform visitors of the current learning target and task. These students represent the voice of their peers at bi-weekly class advocate meetings, by gathering data and information on targeted questions involving student wants and needs related to school events and student concerns. They initiate, develop, and lead school fundraising efforts and participate in selecting instructional field trips. Also, multicultural activities are promoted throughout the year to address the school’s diversity, in both curricular and non-academic activities. Students and parents reported that the school ensures that everyone is respected and valued regardless of ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, religion, or gender. Thus, the mid-year mock student survey shows a significant increase in classroom behavior and social-emotional learning categories compared with the 2017 School Survey results.

- The Advisory program is designed to foster a positive relationship and connection between teacher and student, based on each student’s personalized academic and social-emotional needs and the student’s ability to feel comfortable and safe in school. Lessons focus on school core values: friendship, collaboration, reflection, grit, social-emotional learning, work habits, organizational skills, and effective communication. Advisory groups assigned to support student academic and personal behaviors meet daily. Students reported that in the event they need support, they can go to their advisor or to any adult in the building. An attendance team works with school leaders and counselors to support at-risk students, especially chronically absent students, developing individual attendance plans and monitoring the student’s academic performance. As per attendance reports, cohorts of students are showing improvement in attendance, decreasing year to year absences.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy  
Rating: Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, instructional expectations are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and require teachers to structure instructional blocks in order to maximize student think time. High levels of student participation are reflected as students provide “glows and grows” during peer-to-peer or small group discussions.

Impact

Although teachers are implementing lessons based on the school’s set of beliefs about how students learn best, not all lessons succeed in engaging all students in meaningful discussions and allowing them to show ownership of their learning by taking part in discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms there are uniform structures and protocols that are part of the schoolwide belief system about how students learn best. As part of this expectation, teachers include standards-based learning targets and success criteria in each lesson, which allow students to clearly understand the purpose of the lesson and the criteria they need to meet in order to be successful. Also, lessons engage students in at least 30-minutes of think time, with students working in small groups, pairs, or individually. In visited classes, all teachers started lessons by introducing learning targets and success criteria, ensuring that students understood what they were expected to accomplish. Student interactions revealed that they were familiar with these protocols and most students were able to articulate their expected outcomes for the lesson. In a seventh grade social studies class, the teacher and students went over the “I can” learning targets—I can draw conclusions about slavery in America—and success criteria—I can cite text-based evidence to support my understanding of the text. Then, in small groups, students engaged in a think time activity to examine a chart and map about enslaved Africans during the middle passage. A similar process was observed in most classes. As a result, students have a clear understanding of what is expected in order to produce quality work products.

- Across classrooms, discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation. For example, in a co-teaching seventh grade math class, students were engaged in solving a two-step inequality in small groups and were asked to identify multiple strategies to solve proportional relationship word problems. Students also used the micro lab discussion protocol, accountable talk stems, and academic vocabulary. As part of the protocols used to accomplish their task, students gave “glows” and “grows” to their peers. For example, one student glow was, “You isolate the variable by adding three from both sides of the inequality,” and a grow was, “Perhaps you need to check your calculations when using negative numbers.” After the group work, students engaged in whole class discussion. However, effective group and peer interactions have yet to be fully implemented in few classes, where interaction was mostly teacher-led. This resulted in classrooms with limited student-led conversation and few opportunities for students to share each other’s thinking.

- In an eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were observed identifying and analyzing John Steinbeck’s use of foreshadowing in Of Mice and Men. Students led discussions using accountable talk stems as they shared their thoughts on the ending of chapter three. In their interactions, students demonstrated high levels of engagement and used textual evidence to support their arguments. During whole class discussion, students facilitated their interactions. A similar approach was seen in the seventh grade ELA class, where students had discussions about “approaches taken in ending discrimination.” Across classrooms, student discussions reflected high levels of thinking. In some classes, though, there were a few missed opportunities to deepen thinking and foster student voice and conversation. As a result, some students are prevented from making their thinking visible and taking ownership of their learning process.
Additional Finding

Quality Indicator: 1.1 Curriculum  
Rating: Well Developed

Findings
School leaders and teachers have developed engaging, rigorous curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts, offering meaningful learning experiences where higher order skills are emphasized and tasks promote college and career readiness for all students.

Impact
The alignment of curricula has resulted in coherence across grades and subjects. Academic tasks are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects so that all learners demonstrate thinking.

Supporting Evidence
- School leaders and teachers have strategically developed a uniform process for designing Common Core-aligned unit plans across grades and content areas using a backward design approach. Instructional planning includes summative tasks for each unit based on the standard(s) being addressed, the anchor student learning targets, the sequence of key learning activities, and the strategies to ensure students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) have access to the curriculum. For example, in seventh grade ELA curriculum unit, the summative task was for students to use their own experiences to write a nonfiction narrative about the influence someone from different generation has had on them. Instructional coherence is created by using schoolwide templates for unit planning, lesson planning, and co-teaching, guided by the work of the Center for College and Career Readiness and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels.

- Lesson plans include learning targets aligned to specific standard(s), success criteria to assess student progress towards learning target mastery, academic vocabulary, think time, discussions, and anticipated misconceptions. As a result of using a unified lesson plan template, students experience a coherent curriculum that prepares them for the challenges of college and careers.

- Instructional planning documents revealed that teachers design activities to involve students in collaborative and intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open-ended questions and whole class and small group discussions. This dialogue engages students in discourse and writing where they cite evidence to support and refute claims and counterclaims and synthesize multiple nonfiction and fiction sources to support their claims. Reviewed math lesson plans revealed that teachers require students to use specific mathematical language to explain their reasoning, collaboratively solve problems, and assess one another’s work. Students are well aware of the requirement to consistently and correctly label diagrams and graphs and use the context of the problem to determine the appropriate solution. Students are expected to explain relationships between equations and graphs. Thus, student performance has increased in ELA and math on New York State standardized assessments from 2016 to 2017.

- A review of lesson plans revealed lessons that engage students in challenging tasks where the expectations are the same for all students. To support ELLs, texts are included across a variety of complexity levels. Thus, ELLs and students with disabilities access lessons, gain content knowledge, and understand the units taught. In an eighth grade social studies lesson plan, students are to read texts about atrocities committed by Americans during the Philippine-American War and, as a culminating task, were expected to develop a hypothesis about why American soldiers would commit heinous crimes when they invaded the Philippines. In an eighth grade math lesson plan, students are to analyze sets of data by creating scatter plots to recognize patterns. Students will then determine whether or not sets of data have causal relationships. As a result of the school’s rigorous curriculum, students participate in challenging tasks that promote high level thinking and engage students in authentic learning experiences.
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

Across classrooms, teachers create and use assessments, rubrics, and checklists aligned to the school’s curricula. Teaching practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding to determine student comprehension of the learning objective.

Impact

Teachers use rubrics to provide students with actionable feedback. The use of ongoing checks for understanding results in effective on-the-spot instructional adjustments.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use a school-wide grading policy and rubrics aligned to curricula, providing feedback to students on their performance across content areas. Students reported that they use rubrics and checklists in all subjects to guide completion of tasks in class, essays, projects, and homework. These content-specific rubrics include performance descriptors for four levels of proficiency. In a math rubric, a score of four (expert) indicates that by the end of the task, students will have demonstrated that an efficient strategy was chosen and alternative strategies were considered as well as evidence provided to justify and support decisions made and conclusions reached. Furthermore, students reported that in most subjects they check their work through different methods, such as using colored cups, rubrics, and checklists to self-assess and engage in peer-assessment activities. Most students articulated the value of each rubric to reflect upon their progress and inform next steps for improvement.

- Bulletin boards in classrooms and hallways indicate that teachers use rubrics to assess student proficiency and content knowledge related to specific performance tasks across grades and content areas. For instance, one example of feedback stated, “Good use of documents to support your claim. Good introduction to hook your readers. Next, complete your essays in standard essay format. For the Document Based Question (DBQ) this is crucial. As well as adding more outside information.” However, a review of student work in both classrooms and on bulletin boards revealed teachers only circling or highlighting portions of the rubric, with limited explicit feedback to provide actionable next steps for students to improve their work. In addition, a few of the students interviewed were not able to clearly articulate next steps, based on the feedback written on the work that they presented.

- Most teachers were observed conferring with students to clarify concepts and/or essential skills for academic improvement, such as using strategies for annotating text, expressing more details and ideas in their writing, understanding how to interpret graphs, or citing text after reading primary and secondary source documents. As teachers conferred with students, they pushed students’ thinking, as evidenced in observed lessons and students’ final products. Moreover, most teachers use conference notes, exit slips, and group assessments as part of checks for understanding to make on-the-spot adjustments to lessons to meet the individual and instructional needs of students. For example, in a grade six ICT class, while students were working in groups going over algebraic equations, teachers circulated around the room noting students’ responses. When teachers noticed a pattern of misconceptions or errors within groups, they paused the conversations and divided the class into interior and exterior groups so targeted support could be provided to students. However, this practice is yet to be implemented across the vast majority of classrooms.
**Additional Finding**

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |

**Findings**

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to the entire staff and provide them with professional development to achieve such. High expectations focusing on the path to college and career readiness are systematically communicated by staff and school leaders to students and families.

**Impact**

Staff and families work in collaboration in a culture of mutual accountability that supports student progress toward high expectations. Students receive guidance support and feedback necessary to prepare them for colleges and careers.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders convey high expectations via this instructional focus: “If teachers engage in professional learning around the six co-teaching structures focused on strategic small group instruction, planned interventions, and individualized feedback, then students will have a better understanding of their current performance and actionable next steps as evidenced by improved performance on classroom tasks.” School leaders utilize weekly newsletters, one-on-one meetings, and other professional learning sessions to reiterate expectations, including classwork, homework, and assessment expectations. Frequent cycles of observations and feedback are also aligned to professional development (PD). Teachers shared that school leaders hold them accountable for meeting expectations through team activities, intervisitation, and follow-up conferences with feedback. School leaders also work with all teams to implement protocols for effective use of scheduled team time and for sharing data about grade and class level performance, which inform planning and professional learning across the school.

- Teachers receive professional learning opportunities around the Danielson Framework for Teaching, with emphasis on engaging students in learning and assessments. Teachers reported that they went through a two-week cycle in which they discussed their understanding of the Danielson Framework for Teaching components by watching two videos from EngageNY to capture low inference notes on what the teacher did and what the students did. Teachers then worked in teams to rate the teacher using the rubric. At the end of these sessions, teachers completed surveys about the quality of the session and facilitators meet with school leaders to assess teachers’ perceptions of the sessions and find ways to improve the delivery of PD.

- School leaders and teachers share expectations for student achievement with parents at the beginning of the school year during orientation sessions and regularly scheduled parent workshops, where teachers provide parents with curricula and ensure they can access an online grading system to monitor student progress. Parents enthusiastically reported that access to the system facilitates productive conversations with teachers and informs timely detection of students facing challenges in meeting their grades. This results in the development of collaborative plans to help students at school and at home. Students are supported in their high school research and application process through high school visits, fairs, and high school presentations at the school. Former students also attend and share high school experiences. In addition, the school conducts a College Week, where each teacher leads a lesson focusing on a range of topics, such as campus life, paying for college, and local colleges. The College Access for All initiative helps students build their college knowledge and enables families to help their children navigate the college process. Also, the guidance counselor works with families throughout the year to provide them with all necessary high school articulation information. As a result of these activities, parents are aware of the academic and social-emotional progress of their children as well as their paths for colleges and careers.
Findings

All teachers are organized in department teams to engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations using common protocols to review student work and assessment data on a regular basis. Teachers have opportunities to voice their ideas and take on leadership roles throughout the school.

Impact

Teacher team collaborations engage teachers in discussing best pedagogical practices and making targeted curricula refinements to address the academic needs of their students. Teachers have a voice in key decisions which affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During teacher team meetings, teachers are required to discuss and document how teacher teamwork promotes the school’s instructional focus and what supports are needed to continue student progress, which includes the analysis of student work using the ATLAS protocol. As part of this process, each teacher rotates as the presenter, and the department focuses on analyzing three pieces of student work: high, medium, and low. In addition, teacher teams have collectively created instructional strategies in both literacy and math that support the instructional shifts. Such practices include the use of “think marks,” a strategy used by students to code their thinking as they annotate text, which builds their ability to comprehend complex texts, and the CUBES strategy (circle the numbers, underline the question, box the key words, evaluate, and solve) in math to build students’ conceptual understanding and procedural skills and fluency. Consequently, another outcome of these collaborations is a strategic team approach which creates common strategies across the school, enhancing the instructional capacity of teachers by having them facilitate their own learning and refine their instructional practices.

- During the math team meeting, teachers used examples of student work to assess strengths and weaknesses with ratios and proportions and then discussed instructional strategies to address weaknesses and hold students accountable for being precise and accurate. At the end of the meeting, teachers agreed that their next steps were to include differentiated lesson activities to address misconceptions, such as providing checklists and manipulatives and reconfiguring groupings, which would deepen students’ understanding of concepts and content.

- Teachers shared that school leaders ensure teachers have several opportunities to engage in professional collaborations, such as one hour common weekly planning built into their schedules, used for department meetings. In addition, they have Monday professional development time. As a result, these supports have given teachers a deeper understanding of the demands of the curricula, a better understanding of student progress, and a way to share best practices to improve planning and delivery of instruction.

- School leaders develop and promote teacher leadership. For example, the steering committee is comprised of grade team leaders, department leads, and model teachers. This committee engages in managing resources, planning professional development, and researching innovative ways to enhance the school’s social and academic culture. The decision-making committee meets monthly with the principal to voice issues of concern to the staff and to encourage teacher initiatives in problem-solving. One schoolwide initiative proposed by these groups was teacher-led learning, to build teacher knowledge through the use of texts. For example, the school instituted the use of “Visible Thinking” strategies and protocols after teachers participated in a PD series on the text, Making Thinking Visible. Teachers also actively participate in the hiring process. Constant school progress is taking place as a result of teachers actively taking part in developing instructional programs and systems in collaboration with school leaders.