Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Linden Tree Elementary School
Elementary 11X567
1560 Purdy Street
Bronx
NY 10462

Principal: Lisa Debonis

Dates of Review:
October 11, 2017 - October 12, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier
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

Linden Tree Elementary School serves students in grade PK 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

<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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</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></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Area of Focus</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</td>
<td>Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Area of Celebration

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

## Findings

Structures such as the Linden Leaves, as well as assemblies where students are celebrated for positive behavior, and the student-life teacher team, help foster and support the schoolwide student and staff commitment to shared beliefs around inclusive culture building, discipline, guidance advisement supports and social-emotional learning.

## Impact

Recognition of students' positive behaviors by school leaders, teachers, and students results in a safe, inclusive and respectful environment. Guidance and advisement structures are in place that positively impact students’ academic and personal behaviors and put them on a path to success.

## Supporting Evidence

- Students’ positive behaviors are recognized through the issuance of Linden Leaves, which are color coded leaves that signify the celebrated behavior. Gold leaves are issued to students for academic excellence. Purple leaves represent actions taken toward community improvement. Green leaves are issued to students who exhibit a positive growth mindset in that they are trying hard and being persistent and blue leaves are issued for students as they are “caught being kind.” Teachers display the different leaves earned by students in their classrooms. Students earning purple, green, and blue leaves are announced daily, and students are also recognized at monthly assemblies. Additionally, leaves are assigned a monetary value so that students can use them as currency at the school store. One student reported and all present agreed that “the leaves allow us to be proud of ourselves.” One student reported that she was issued a blue leaf because she had returned a teacher’s lost wallet while another earned a purple leaf because he had witnessed bullying and stepped in to stop it from escalating.

- Students are selected as Student Union leaders once they are recognized at one of the monthly assemblies during which they are celebrated as exemplifying one of the qualities of the month. The first letter of each of the qualities forms the name of the school. They are: learning, individuality, nurturing, determination, equality, nobility, trustworthy, respect, empathy, and effort. Students are trained as peer mediators once identified as a student leader. Additionally, when students are assigned to report to the Lunch Bunch as a result of some infraction, they complete a reflective activity called the Behavior Think Sheet. This reflection worksheet includes prompts to require students to consider the nature of the behavior that resulted in assignment to Lunch Bunch, how that behavior may have affected others, and plans for improvement of future behavior.

- School counselors, deans, school leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals meet within the structure of a Student Life Committee. This committee meets daily to review all referrals that detail students’ disciplinary infractions, attendance trends, and issues around academic performance. The committee maintains a log, accessible to all teachers, which tracks specific information around each incident as well as the subsequent resulting actions. Additionally, teachers meet once a month to identify the students who should be celebrated for exhibiting the qualities of the month.
## Area of Focus

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

Although teachers across classrooms use or create rubrics and grading policies that are fairly aligned with the school’s curricula, teachers’ assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Use of aligned rubrics does not yet result in teachers consistently providing actionable feedback to students regarding their achievement. Teachers’ ability to consistently make effective adjustments is limited, thereby not meeting all students’ learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- Analysis of teachers’ written feedback to students revealed that teachers inconsistently offer actionable feedback and that, when offered, the quality of actionable feedback varies. Examples of actionable feedback issued for a grade-one math assignment included guidance for students to break down the problem step-by-step and to check number sentences to make sure they were correct. Examples from a grade-two writing assignment advised students to use dialogue to show which character was talking, bring a story to life, and to increase the use of action words. Grade-five students benefited from writing assignment feedback that highlighted the importance of being specific when making predictions, using reasoning to explain predictions, and rereading in order to correct grammatical errors. There were also examples of feedback to students that were copied verbatim for multiple students on the same assignment. One such example was found in a grade-one classroom where multiple students were advised “Next time, we can include more feeling words to describe how much it hurt.” In another class, multiple students received identical feedback advising them to re-read their writing, checking for spelling and punctuation errors. However, in three classrooms there was an absence of teacher feedback to students both on the work displayed on the bulletin boards and in student work portfolios.

- During a grade-two lesson in which students were tasked with adding “strong words” to their writing, they were asked to hold-up a self-assessment card that would indicate their comfort level with the next steps for this lesson. A majority of students held up a blue card, signifying that they were confident in the assigned task. In a grade-five math lesson, the teacher circulated throughout the room to check on students’ success in writing twenty-one and three hundredths in letter format. The teacher subsequently spoke with various students about their progress and answered questions asked by students.

- In a grade-one writing lesson, an opportunity for adjusting the lesson after a check-for-understanding was missed when approximately half of the students were still at the planning stage of their writing while the remaining students were already at the final-draft publishing stage. There were no adjustments to student groupings or to instructional strategies. Additionally, during a grade-three reading lesson, students were asked to define the word *amateurs* by using clues from the sentence posted at the front of the room. Some of the tips that readers could use to define words were to determine the gist of the sentence, find synonyms and antonyms, and to see if there was an explanation in the text that helped define the word. Although students struggled to determine the definition of *amateur*, there was no adjustment made to instruction to address the lack of success students had with using the strategy that was just shared with them. Additionally, there were multiple classrooms where checks for understanding, either for content or student understanding of what was expected of them regarding process, were not conducted.
Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards, content standards, and integrating the instructional shifts. Additionally, planning is beginning to reflect an effort to provide diverse learners access to the curricula and tasks.

Impact

Unit and lesson plans inconsistently reflect integration of the instructional shifts. While some curricular documents reveal a growing practice of planning for diverse learners, there is inconsistent planning to ensure that the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities are met.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricular documents reveals that lesson plans note the Common Core Learning Standards or content area standards, where appropriate. However, integration of the instructional shifts is inconsistent. Specific planning around the support of students’ development of academic vocabulary appears in English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plans for grades three and four and in a math lesson plan for grade five. Additionally, a grade-five reading unit challenges students to increase their ability to tackle complex texts through five sessions. Math lesson plans for grades two and kindergarten reveal that students are tasked with representing numbers in different ways. However, there is no evidence of planning to ensure that students support arguments with text-based evidence, apply math concepts to real world situations, or access math concepts from a variety of perspectives.

- Lesson plans reflect a growing level of planning to provide access to the curricula for students with disabilities. A grade-one reading lesson plan from an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class includes the list of students who will sit with one of two teachers who will “ensure that students are staying with the same topic and using their strong feeling in order to tell it across pages.” This information, including the students’ names and statements as to instruction, is repeated verbatim in the three accompanying lesson plans from the same unit. A grade-one writing lesson plan for a different ICT class states that teachers will monitor students’ independent work and determine which students will be placed in one of two groups in which those students would receive targeted instruction. A grade-three lesson plan makes clear that students will be grouped based on progress monitoring from the previous lesson. There are also lesson plans that evidence either minimal or no planning for students with disabilities to have access to curricula and tasks. For example, a grade-two math lesson plan indicates that students will receive small-group instruction as the plan for differentiation while there is an absence of any methods of differentiation or provision of scaffolded supporting materials to students in lesson plans for grade-two math, grade-three reading, and grade-five reading.

- Lesson plans reflect a growing level of planning to provide access to the curricula for ELLs. A grade-three writing lesson plan indicates that students of varying levels of language acquisition will receive targeted assistance from a teacher and have different dictionaries available to them. A grade-one writing lesson plan notes the students who will be placed in a separate group in which they will receive supports targeted to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Across the remaining collected lesson plans associated with the classrooms visited during the review, there is an absence of planning differentiated instruction that includes high quality scaffolded supports and extensions specific to the needs of ELLs.
### Additional Finding

#### Quality Indicator:

| 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: Proficient |

#### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, teaching strategies compensate for limitations in planning by consistently providing multiple entry points into the curricula.

#### Impact

The belief that students learn best when they are working in purposefully designed small groups is evident across classrooms. However, the design and delivery of instruction that includes multiple entry points has not yet resulted in high-quality supports and extensions to ensure appropriately leveled work for diverse learners.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching practices reflected the belief that students learn best when they are seated in groups that will sometimes change to reflect either the task or students’ needs. During a grade-two writing lesson, students were organized into groups and edited their descriptive writing pieces with the goal of adding strong words to help highlight character traits and bring life to a story. Similarly, after sitting together as a whole-class for instruction on how to show two-digit numbers in different ways, students in a grade-two math lesson sat with their assigned groups to begin working on tasks to reinforce those skills. Other examples of this practice were observed during a grade-four writing lesson, grade-five reading lesson, and grade-five math lesson.

- In a grade-two ICT class, students were editing their descriptive writing pieces while working within groups that had been designed based on student need. In this class, an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher worked with the ELLs in a dedicated group, while another teacher sat with a group of students who needed extra help. All other students who needed no additional supports sat in the remaining three groups with the general education teacher’s support. During a grade-one writing lesson, students reported to their groups after the whole-class mini lesson where they worked on either planning their writing pieces or editing their completed drafts, while specified students who needed additional support sat at a table with a teacher where they benefited from a reteaching session. Students in a grade-three ICT class worked with partners within their groups to locate the clue words in a reading passage that would help them determine the definition for specific vocabulary words. While one group received targeted instruction as per students’ needs for additional supports, all other students were working within groups that had an identical assignment.

- During a kindergarten math lesson, the teacher identified five students who were instructed to sit with the teacher at a specific table so that they could receive additional direct instruction on how to find different ways to represent the number five. While the majority of students in a grade-two class were tasked with finding multiple ways of representing either the number 60 or 65, a group of students receiving additional support from a teacher in their group worked on the same task for the number 24. Students were grouped based on achievement levels in a grade-five math class where the teacher read aloud numbers in decimal form that the students were tasked with writing in expanded, unit, and word forms. Along with being purposefully grouped as per achievement data, students were also able to utilize a place value chart in organizing their responses.
### Findings

High expectations are consistently conveyed to staff through documents and professional learning with a system of accountability that is aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The school provides ongoing information to families regarding student progress towards college and career readiness.

### Impact

The faculty handbook, lesson plan writing rubric, and weekly newsletters help staff members understand the high expectations to which they are held. Ongoing communication with families and monthly student progress reports provide opportunities for them to understand student progress towards meeting standards.

### Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are communicated to staff through a *Grading Policy Handbook*. This guide includes information covering the various facets of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Some examples include maintenance of a positive classroom environment through student motivation, student assessment, the establishment of homework policy, and the instructional focus for the school year. Additionally, guides for planning lessons, determining what materials should be placed on bulletin boards, and defining academic vocabulary for grades three through five are shared with teachers. The principal also sends a daily morning email, entitled *Lisa’s Linden Lowdown*, in which information about upcoming events, and expectations for the day and week are shared. At the bottom of each daily email are links to the different tracking tools that teachers are expected to use to monitor student behavior and academic progress and without which the Student Life Committee meetings would not function.

- School leaders provide professional development (PD) in four-session cycles. Each PD session is entitled in a way that reflects the word *tree* in the school’s name. The first week is called root PD. Pertinent information about regulations, upcoming events, and other issues around logistics, tools, and resources are shared. The second week is called trunk PD. This session involves working sessions for the school’s professional learning communities (PLCs). The third week is called stem PD. This session involves planning time for project-based learning. The fourth week is called branching-out PD. During this final session, teachers select a task from a menu of professional responsibilities in which they may engage. Some examples of these professional responsibilities include collaborative planning, teacher mentoring, bulletin board updating, and classroom environment organization.

- School leaders and staff communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career through weekly homework sheets provided to parents, along with cover sheets that provide information for parents about each unit of study in which their children will be engaged. Families also receive progress reports in the interim between official school report cards. One parent reported, and all present agreed, that the progress reports that they receive help keep them informed about how their children are doing academically. Parents also praised teachers for communicating with them via an online platform through which pictures and messages are shared, keeping parents promptly informed about what is happening in class. Additionally, families receive monthly calendars informing them about upcoming events, meeting dates, and the various workshops and learning opportunities that are available to them.
Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Teachers’ collaborations strengthen their instructional capacity. Additionally, teacher voice is included in unit design, grade restructuring, and PD facilitation.

Supporting Evidence

- The grade-five PLC met to review ELL students’ data. The subsequent discussion focused on what teachers noticed about the students who were not progressing in their English language acquisition. After this discussion, all teachers read and discussed a professional article that shared tips on teaching vocabulary to ELLs. This was followed by a discussion of strategies that might help move students along, such as studying cognates, prefixes and suffixes. Teachers also shared some of the strategies they read about that they employed in their classes. One teacher spoke about students’ continued struggles with differentiating between J and G, having knowledge of individual letter sounds but not being able to successfully use them together when reading a word aloud. Another teacher shared successes in her class with using a strategy that requires students to tap their fingers with each sound in a word. Teachers decided to continue using and sharing the results of different strategies aimed at increasing students’ vocabulary and that teachers should be prepared to discuss student engagement at the next meeting, as this would be the team’s focus.

- Teachers strengthen their instructional capacity through team-based collaborations. One new teacher reported learning, as a result of conversations during team meetings, how Webb’s Depth of Knowledge tool to develop questions of increasing rigor could be used to improve instructional planning. Another teacher reported, and all present agreed, that when the ENL teacher presented a variety of strategies that are employed with ELLs, the teachers found success in using these same strategies not only with ELLs, but also with students with disabilities and students not requiring additional supports or modifications.

- Teachers serve as members of the instructional leadership team (ILT). In this role, they have a voice in instructional decisions as they meet with school leaders to plan for school initiatives, such as the enrichment period that all students are programmed for based upon performance data. Additionally, teachers serve as grade-level leaders and coaches. They facilitate PD sessions, and have a voice in decisions such as the restructuring of grade one as well as implementing a log for tracking students' behavior and academic progress. Teachers report that they make decisions about instructional units and assume a variety of roles during teacher team meetings.