Quality Review Report

2018-2019

P.S. 159 Isaac Pitkin
Elementary 19K159
2781 Pitkin Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11208

Principal: Monica Duncan

Dates of Review:
March 20, 2019 - March 21, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Debra T asioudis
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

P.S. 159 Isaac Pitkin 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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</tr>
<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>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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
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### 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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</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

Structures for guidance, such as clubs and mentoring are in place for the academic and personal growth of students. The school community strategically aligns professional learning, family outreach, and student learning experiences and supports.

Impact

Each student is known well and receives personalized guidance and social-emotional learning support. Learning experiences for staff, students and families result in the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors by students.

Supporting Evidence

- In a meeting with students, all shared that they are known well by at least one adult, and several pointed to more than one adult as being there to provide them with guidance and support in helping them to work through problems. Several students pointed to current or former teachers, or paraprofessionals. A few students in the group who also spoke Bengali or Spanish appreciate that there are adults at the school whom they or their parents can speak to in either language. One student shared that he appreciates that his former teacher is also Bengali and is always there for him to talk about his life, at home and at school. The school also has clubs and groups such as the Girls Who Code club, and a co-ed step team, and several members shared that through the clubs they have learned self-confidence and a sense of belonging. Students also shared that the adults who lead the groups provide them with guidance about doing well at school, managing life outside of school, and handling conflict with other students. The school also has mentoring programs for boys and girls. Students engaged in mentoring shared that they receive ongoing guidance, and learn self-confidence as they spend time with the adult leader of their groups and their peers. Other students shared that they are always able to talk with a school leader for guidance and support. Because of these close relationships for students to receive guidance and support, the has been a dramatic drop in the number of suspensions and removals from 85 the previous year to fourteen thus far this year.

- Parents praised the school’s structures for guidance and support and appreciate that there are daily personal calls about attendance to support families, rather than place blame. As one parent shared, “If there is an issue, you move, or something comes up with the family, they really work with you. They make sure that you have what you need, whether it’s time to just talk at breakfast, or clothing; they really try to work with you.” Parents also praised teachers for talking with them daily through phone calls or text messages about their children’s behavior and progress. As another parent shared, “I don’t have to go out of my way; the teacher makes it really easy to stay in touch and talk about what is going on at home.”

- The school strategically aligns learning experiences for families and staff about supporting adult and student mental health. For parents, there are workshops about supporting students with anxiety and positive behavior supports. For staff, there are learning sessions about mindfulness, promoting positive behaviors and taking a restorative approach to student conflict and students in crisis. The school has also engaged in professional learning about recognizing implicit bias and equity to ensure that students feel recognized and motivated in the classroom.

- Purposeful teaching addresses student conflict across the grades. Students learn to tell others what they did and how it made them feel, answer the other person, accept fault or innocence, and to go to tell an adult, known as TAG. Parents, students and staff praised TAG and shared that students have adopted it across the school. One parent shared that their child has adopted more self-regulation and seeks out an adult to talk to, before just quickly reacting in a disagreement with a peer, also reflected in the reduction of incidents across the school.
Area of Focus

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

Teachers and staff use common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across grades and subjects; in some subjects, there is a clear portrait of student mastery. Additionally, teachers check for understanding and provide opportunities for student self-assessment across the school.

Impact

While there is not yet evidence that all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) are demonstrating increased mastery and are aware of their next learning steps, there are effective adjustments to curricula and instruction to meet students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers analyze the results of reading and math assessments, given at benchmarks throughout the year to determine student progress and adjust the curricula. After these assessments are administered, teachers receive itemized reports about student performance that are used to identify areas of student growth and struggle. Teachers then create lessons to reteach content, decide on student grouping, and ways to supplement the curricula, by adding learning experiences, such as Word Problem Wednesdays, added lessons to focus students on problem solving. Teachers also use the results of chapter tests in math and mock State exams to create supplemental lessons for math stations to tailor instruction for groups of students. In first grade, teachers noticed a disconnect in student achievement in addition and subtraction units that were taught separately. As a result, the math coach worked with the team to revise the pacing calendar to put the two skills together to improve student learning. In science, the cluster teacher also administers common hands-on assessments to adjust teaching practices in the school’s new science curricula.

- Across the grades, teachers also administer running records to determine reading progress, as demonstrated in assessment spreadsheets shared at the time of the review. From the spreadsheets, there is clear notation of students who are making progress in reading levels or staying the same. Teachers and students use these reading levels to set goals in reading, to select appropriate texts, and to determine strategies of focus. The school also utilizes an online reading program that assesses student learning and tailors texts and text-based questions to support students in making progress toward their reading goals. Teachers use the results of both reading assessments to guide teacher-student conferences about reading and to group students into partnerships and guided reading groups. While these, and assessments in other subject areas allow teachers to track progress and make informed instructional decisions, there is not yet evidence that all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs are demonstrating increased mastery.

- Teachers check for understanding in a variety of ways across classrooms, including questioning, the use of red, yellow green cards, monitoring student performance on an opening problem or task; however, students are not always aware of their next learning steps. In most classes visited, teachers made on-the-spot adjustments for learners, as observed in a science lesson where the teacher stopped the groups to demonstrate proper use of a meter stick for measurement. Similarly, in a reading lesson, the teacher used student notes from their texts about character traits at the beginning of the lesson to regroup students during work time. In a few classes, students were aware of their next learning steps, as seen in a math class where students were given task cards that included required and extension activities, so that students were aware of the lesson trajectory and could create their own problems comparing fractions.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are align to the Common Core and strategically focus on text-based evidence, academic vocabulary and problem solving in challenging tasks. Additionally, the curricula promotes higher-order thinking through planning of purposeful questions and tasks.

Impact

Curricula are coherent across the grades and subjects and embed opportunities for all learners to demonstrate higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plans for math shared across the school are aligned to the Common Core, focus on application and problem solving in real-world situations, and ask students to engage in math problem solving together, or independently, through tasks and purposefully planned questions. In a measurement and data-focused lesson plan shared for second grade, students were asked to solve word problems involving coins, first by answering higher-order thinking questions about how coins are used in their daily lives, and which ways make the most sense for organizing coins before sending students off to solve and create their own word problems involving coins. The lesson also included online tasks and three levels of tasks to scaffold learning for ELLs and other students who needed it, as well as options for students to choose from a set of different problems to solve, or to partner with a buddy to check one another’s work. The clarity of tasks and scaffolds to create access for a variety of learners into problem solving was common in the math lesson plans shared across the school. Similarly, a science lesson plan shared included a Common-Core standard for demonstrating understanding of an information text and a State science standard for demonstrating physics concepts of movement and motion through hands-on collaborative problem-solving tasks. The inclusion of hands-on tasks, ramp kits for students to label and build, and science journal questions are embedded opportunities for access and for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking.

- Literacy lesson plans shared are also Common-Core aligned, usually with a focus on gathering text-based evidence, and include three tasks to meet the needs of students working below, on and above the grade level. In a fourth-grade lesson plan on reading informational text, students examine academic vocabulary and author’s point of view in texts that students either read or listen to. All three tasks require students to explain academic vocabulary contained in the passages on organic foods, and collect evidence from the text into writing. The plan also includes higher-order thinking questions, such as, “Is it helpful to present both sides of an argument? Why or why not?”, and prompts to create and defend their own claims about genetically modified foods using evidence from the text. The varied tasks and higher-order thinking questions found in this lesson plan, and others across the grades ensure that students, including students with disabilities and ELLs demonstrate their thinking and build college readiness skills.

- Units shared for all subjects also demonstrate close alignment to Common Core and State standards, as observed in a lower-grade social studies unit on the rights, roles and responsibilities of New York City residents. The unit also includes rigorous tasks, such as analyzing primary sources, engaging in debates, and making connections between historical content and current news stories. The unit also contains a plethora of online resources, organized by higher-order thinking questions such as, “How do families influence who we are?” This planning with integrated tasks and resources, common across the grades and subjects, promotes college readiness for all learners as seen in similarly planned literacy, math and science units.
Additional Finding

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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 access to the thinking of peers, manipulatives, and vocabulary supports consistently provide multiple entry points into student work and discussions.

Impact
All learners are engaged in challenging tasks and student work and discussions demonstrate high levels of participation and higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching strategies, including providing students with access to the thinking of peers, manipulatives, vocabulary supports are used to scaffold learning as children engage in challenging tasks. In an upper-grade math class, students worked in small groups to interpret fractions as division using a variety of supports, including white boards to demonstrate their thinking and discuss their work with peers, playing a game with peers in which students create and solve problems with fractions as they justify their thinking to peers. In one group, a student shared his work with a peer and chided himself for an incorrect answer. His peer reviewed his work on the whiteboard and replied, “You just switched the number. You can easily fix this!” The student then proceeded to revise his thinking before moving on to the next student’s turn. In this instance, as in other classes, access to the thinking of peers and the use of manipulatives allows students to engage in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills.

- Similarly, in a reading lesson on understanding character traits, students worked in small groups to find evidence in their fiction texts that describe their main character’s traits and motivations. In one group, a student stumbled through a passage and a peer offered to start again, reading the passage aloud for the group. This allowed the three students to focus together on the author’s words and engage in a high-level discussion about whether the main character in the story was a mean person, or was just being rude in the moment in the passage. Other groups engaged in similarly high-level discussions, some using an anchor chart of possible character traits to build their vocabulary as they discussed traits of their characters. In a lower-grade phonics lesson, students worked independently in tables of four, reviewing letter sounds and making digraphs. Though students worked independently, students at each table offered each other guidance about the sounds that letters make, or which letter tiles to place first to help them create digraphs. Some students in the class also talked to each other in English and Bengali, allowing students to demonstrate higher-order thinking about their work in both languages.

- Though not yet in the vast majority of classes, in a few, students demonstrated ownership of their learning. In a math lesson on comparing fractions, students worked in small groups and were given task cards to guide them through the work period. The tasks allowed students to work with independence and use teacher modeling from the lesson’s opening to guide their thinking, rather than rely on the teacher to provide them with clarity. The task also included extension activities that allowed students who were ready to move on to more advance work the opportunity to create their own problems and create new learning experiences for themselves and their peers within the group.
Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

School leaders and school staff consistently communicate high expectations to staff, including instructional non-negotiables connected to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders and staff effectively communicate high expectations and clarity regarding instructional strategies to families.

Impact

School staff hold one another accountable to high expectations. Teachers and school leaders form a strong partnership with parents to support student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff through written communication and create a culture of mutual accountability through professional learning experiences connected to those expectations. A staff handbook includes instructional non-negotiables about teacher moves for questioning and discussion techniques, student engagement and assessing student learning, aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching. These expectations and suggested strategies to be used in the classroom are also communicated in emails by the school leaders to reinforce those expectations, and are further supported by online learning repositories for each grade level that provides teachers with sample lessons, discussion and assessment strategies and allows teachers to contribute resources for all to use. One email reviewed reiterated expectations for providing students with challenging, differentiated, equitable learning experiences in a warm supportive environment. Expectations are also reinforced in daily announcements, staff meetings, grade conferences, and memos shared with staff after classroom visits. In addition, the administration produces a monthly calendar for all staff to keep them abreast of things that will be taking place throughout the building on a day-to-day basis.

- Grade leaders allow for mutual accountability for planning for instructional expectations. Both school and grade leaders meet regularly to discuss the school's instructional focus on students creating and solving math problems, as well as the instructional non-negotiables. The grade leaders then meet with the grade teams and ensure that there is consistency and coherence in planning and instructional practices across the grade. Teams have regular common planning time in which teachers review expectations, lesson plans and teaching strategies together. Through this work, teachers schedule intervisitations among themselves to support each other in trying new instructional strategies or observing a colleague use an assessment technique that they have not yet tried. Grade leaders also meet with school leaders and create other teacher professional learning sessions requested by teachers or seen as a need across the grade that are also led by teachers. Professional learning records shared demonstrate that there is teacher-led professional learning on a variety of topics, including special education, literacy, math, assessment, creating a positive school culture and culturally-responsive pedagogical practices.

- During a meeting with parents, the discussion largely focused on praise for teachers in successfully partnering with families to help them understand their children’s progress. Daily, teachers use online platforms to keep families informed about student successes and needs, both big and small, and send home detailed monthly progress reports to keep parents informed about how their children are performing. Through this written communication and in-person meetings, on Tuesdays or at parent request, staff also keep families informed about how to support their children’s learning at home. Parents appreciate that there are online resources in all subjects, and especially appreciate that the school provides opportunities for families and children to do math together online. Teachers also provide ongoing academic workshops on all of the curricula and send weekly letters home to keep parents informed about the week’s learning and additional resources to support that learning at home.
### Additional Finding

<table>
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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

**Findings**

Teachers engage in inquiry focused on improving curricula and instruction in teams such as the vertical data team. Distributive leadership structures, such as grade leaders and coaches are in place.

**Impact**

Inquiry teams promote the achievement of school goals and the Common Core, and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers. Teachers have a voice in decisions that impact on student learning.

**Supporting Evidence**

- During the review, the school’s vertical data team was observed, engaging in an inquiry-based professional collaboration connected to the school’s instructional focus to have students create and solve math problems. A review of the team’s notes demonstrate that the format of each meeting is consistent, with teachers and school leaders using a protocol to review student work from across the grade, connected to a problem of practice. For the observed meeting, the team focused on student understanding of simplifying fractions with an eye toward revising curricular materials and instructional strategies. The team organized student work pieces into high, middle and lower performing on the task, discussed student strengths and needs represented in the completed tasks and discussed implemented strategies to support students in simplifying fractions, such as the use of fraction model bars and collaboratively developed anchor charts with translated math terms. Teachers were able to see evidence in the student work products of use of the strategies, and caused teachers to refer back to the organization of questions within the task. From this, teachers made connections to the Common Core standards and the New York State Math Exam. Through their discussion of the task provided in the curricula, the standard and their review of student work, teachers reflected on their own instructional practices, such as modeling of the task, use of manipulatives and how students wrote about their thinking. This demonstrates an inquiry approach to promote the school’s goals and strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers.

- Teachers surfaced successes and strategies to support students with disabilities and ELLs from across their classes, voted on instructional priorities given their discussion and set a new problem of practice to continue their work, using peer teaching and re-teaching in small groups to address further student need in renaming fractions with common denominators. Teachers also isolated strategies to support students with disabilities and ELLs, adding multiplication flash cards to scaffold learning and using online resources to bring the unit’s vocabulary to life. The team’s work demonstrates a connection to the school’s goals for supporting students with disabilities and ELLs, as well as strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers through reflection and building shared knowledge and instructional strategies with colleagues. Team meeting notes shared from other teams demonstrate a similar process of looking at student work to refine instructional strategies and curricular priorities, trying out new strategies, and engaging in collaborative reflection and revision of curricular and instructional resources. While the work of teacher teams is not yet demonstrating increased student achievement for all learners, there is coherence in planning for differentiated tasks for groups of students.

- Grade leaders are a distributive leadership structures in place to ensure that teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning. Teacher teams influence instructional and curricular decisions, giving teachers voice. Teachers from the first-grade team shared that they invited the school leaders to a team meeting to discuss problems with the pacing calendar for math, and were successful in revising it to put the separate units on addition and subtraction together thus, having an impact on student learning across the grade.