Quality Review Report

2018-2019

J.H.S. 234 Arthur W. Cunningham
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 22K234
1875 East 17 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11229

Principal: Tami Flynn

Dates of Review:
April 16, 2019 - April 17, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Carlos Perez
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


School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<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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</table>
## School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>Additional Finding</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>
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## Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>
</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>Area of Celebration</td>
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<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>
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<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>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings

School leaders and teacher peers support the development of all teachers with effective feedback from strategic and frequent cycles of classroom observations. Feedback to teachers accurately captures strengths and offers clear next steps based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Schoolwide instructional practices with an emphasis on conferencing with students elevate and promote teachers’ professional growth and reflection. Feedback to teachers articulates clear expectations and aligns with professional goals for teachers.

Supporting Evidence

- Feedback provided teachers through the school’s observation process identify areas of strength, and offers clear actionable next steps. Relevant resources including websites and attachments are often included in the recommendations to ensure additional, specific support. Feedback to a teacher’s English Language Arts (ELA) lesson praised the teacher for her knowledge of the content and her pedagogical practices that included making cross-subject connections to post-World War I and post-World War II using J.D. Salinger’s *A Perfect Day*. The school leader offered the teacher next steps that included increasing the amount of time that she conferenced with students. Challenging students with work based on her conferencing notes was an additional recommendation. Feedback to another teacher celebrated the manner by which she created a positive classroom environment and for her classroom management.

- In addition to the formalized observation process, school leaders have created an online tool that documents all formal and informal observations. Teachers and school leaders have equal access to the documents that allows both to see items discussed and observed during an observation. Adjustments made to lessons and the follow up to conversations that took place during pre and post observation meetings are posted. At the start of the year, the principal meets with school leaders and creates a list of teachers for each to observe. After all teachers have been observed once, the principal creates another cycle to ensure that different school leaders will observe different teachers. All teachers enthusiastically voiced the effectiveness of the feedback they receive. One teacher shared that the feedback is “Timely and specific” and whatever feedback is offered to her she implements as “quickly as possible”. Teachers explained they often visit other colleagues who are recognized as being strong in the area in which they need to improve.

- Teacher goals are collaboratively created between teachers and school leaders at the start of each year during the Initial Planning Conferences (IPCs). Teacher goals are referenced during pre and post observation conferences and often are part of the feedback to teachers in observation reports. During the meeting with teachers, several teachers explained that their goals are consistently discussed throughout the school year during meetings and as part of the written feedback they are provided. Student data is regularly reviewed to help teachers adjust their goals or create new ones should they achieve a goal earlier than expected. For example, a teacher extended her goal to include helping students create their own high levels of questions as a result of her successfully implementing an increase in the amount of questioning and discussion in her lessons.
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 use rubrics, assessments and grading policies that align to the schools’ curricula. Teachers consistently check for student understanding during lessons, most notably through conferencing with students.

Impact

Across some, but not the vast majority of classes teachers provide feedback to students that is actionable and meaningful. In many, but not all classes, teachers adjust lessons resulting in all students being aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers conference with students to ascertain their understanding. During a seventh-grade science lesson the teacher conferenced with students as they worked in groups to construct a cell tower designed to withstand a simulated earthquake. In addition, students self-assessed their towers and offered other groups written and verbal feedback related to their projects. During a math lesson students engaged in several instances of peer assessment during group presentations following the solution of an assigned math problem. However, during a seventh-grade science lesson where the teacher conferenced with students, the use of an instrument to memorialize or collect the conference data was not in evidence. As a result, adjustments were not made and limited the students’ awareness of their next learning steps.

- Feedback to students across classrooms was able to capture students’ strengths and offered next steps that were clear and actionable. Feedback to a student’s writing assignment praised the student for a “fantastic analysis” of the character because it included strong details from the text. It was then recommended that the student go through his assignment and read all of the notes that indicated grammatical errors. On a math assignment related to finding unit rate, the student was commended for successfully finding the correct unit rates and offered next steps on how to compare all of the unit rates in the final question. During the meeting students explained that they receive a great deal of feedback during their classes. One student said he receives “A lot of feedback in math because it is my weakness.” Another student shared that ELA is the subject where she receives most of her feedback especially addressing her writing assignments. Students did share that they do not receive the same level of feedback in other subject classes,

- Teachers use a variety of assessment tools including questioning strategies, exit slips, and peer and self-assessment. The school uses summative assessments that include benchmark exams and pre and post assessments for each unit, with a particular focus on the writing units. Results are used to modify instruction. School assessments for eighth-grade students include regents-level questions to help ensure that those students taking the state regents exams in Science, ELA and math will be successful. As a result of data analysis conducted by math teachers, the math department shifted the pacing in math and moved the geometry unit to earlier in the year to address the language of the math questions from the state education department and provide students time to become familiar with the way questions are posed.
Additional Finding

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

All staff ensures that engaging, rigorous, coherent curricula that can be fully assessed and linked to real world situations are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (Common Core). Rigorous tasks are planned for all learners across all grades and subjects.

Impact

There is curricular coherence across grades and subjects that promote college and career readiness for all students. All learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- There is a district-wide focus to ensure that all instructional objectives are meaningful and can be fully assessed. For example, the objective for a math lesson plan states, “Students will be able to meaningfully describe the solution to a system of linear equations." In addition to constructing a graphing model, assessment practices include conferencing with students using guided questions and a written assignment that shows how students will write their own systems on linear equations. An eighth-grade Spanish plan requires students give directions in Spanish using a map and relates to a real life application of their learning. Assessment methods directly connected to the objective include peer assessment during partner discussions, teacher conferencing and evaluating partner discussions and the completion of a student work sheet. Lesson plans for other subject areas include the same connection between objective and assessment practices.

- Rigorous habits for all students are evidenced throughout all planning documents. High-level questions are included for all students, with appropriate scaffolds for ELLs and students with disabilities. Translated vocabulary lists, sentence starters, and chunked texts are embedded in all plans reviewed. Scaffold questions often included a column for text details and a column for explanation to help students’ structure their thinking. A robotics lesson where students investigated the role of sensors and their significance to a robot’s function included video clips, modeling, and an exemplar of a sensor ensuring all students access to the task. A plan for a 12:1:1 self-contained science lesson plan required students to act as paleontologists, create their own fossils, and had to identify, catalogue, and explicitly describe other students’ fossils.

- All planning documents clearly exhibited coherent planning in areas such as instructional objectives, essential questions, and academic vocabulary. In addition, the planning for student-centered instruction with opportunities for students to take ownership is in evidence across units. This includes planning for students that requires they actively work with partners/groups, present work to classmates, engage in project-based learning, create procedures, adjust learning plans and own revisions. This was most notable in an engineering plan where students had to create a cell phone tower, predict as to whether it would withstand a simulated earthquake, adjust their design if needed and explain their process in designing their tower. A social studies lesson plan, included higher-level DOK questions that students as they worked in groups would answer as well as how they would peer assess each other during group discussions.
Additional Finding

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

Across classrooms, teaching practices and student work products are aligned to the curricula and reflect the articulated belief that students learn best when instruction is student centered and involves collaborative problem solving.

Impact

Students produce meaningful work products that reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- During a social studies lesson, students actively worked in groups in order to discuss various questions such as, “What evidence supports the idea that the speaker does not like her job?” Students were required to include at least two pieces of evidence in their discussions. Student responses included, “The speaker does not like her job. This is supported by words such as gray office, and the basics.” During a seventh-grade science class students worked in groups to identify the various kinds of damage caused by earthquakes. Students designed cell phone towers using toothpicks and mini marshmallows and were required to predict, adjust, and explain their thoughts behind their constructions.

- Throughout the school student work products on display demonstrated collaborative problem solving. Student math products evidenced peer feedback where students contributed a strategy their classmates could use. In addition, students referenced common mistakes that each group made. Students pointed out their peers’ confusion with area and perimeter, or their failure to justify answers and offer detailed responses. In social studies students discussed the posters they had created. One poster asked a question related to whether “service makes life easier.” One student’s response included how community service does make life easier because it “Brings people together.”

- In a social studies class, students discussed Ancient Athenians’ views of education compared and contrasted with present days’ views of education. During students’ conversation, they cited text-based evidence to support their answers. One student stated, “It’s highly important that we support our predictions with text-based evidence” and “I think it is similar because Ancient Athenians believed that education was important just like it is now.” Students were eager and exited to share their responses and regularly used accountable talk stems to help facilitate their discourse. During a robotics lesson, once again student centered instruction was in evidence as students worked in groups in order to program sensors on a robot that would recognize obstacles and allow the robot to navigate around the obstacle and complete its trip.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations via the school handbook, the principal’s weekly, monthly newsletters, and the school’s own website. Staff members partner with families and students by consistently and systematically communicating expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

Training is provided to all staff that results in a culture of mutual accountability towards all schoolwide expectations. The clear and focused feedback supports families’ understanding of expectations and ensures all students own their educational experience.

Supporting Evidence

- Schoolwide expectations are communicated at the very start of the school year through the staff handbook. School leaders consistently communicate through the weekly and monthly newsletters, and via the school’s website. Furthermore through the teacher observation process expectations are specifically expressed to staff. Coaches regularly work with teachers in order to support the school’s instructional focus and act as additional resources between teachers and administration. Teachers have common planning time and engage in inter-visitations to observe and share best practices. During the meeting with teachers all teachers shared that they “Go out of their way” to hold themselves accountable for meeting all instructional expectations. Collaborating amongst peers is a key way they hold themselves accountable. In addition, they shared that the administration is constantly informing them of potential professional development (PD) offerings. One teacher stated, “This morning alone we received three emails about future PD opportunities.”

- Families receive communications regularly pertaining to either their child’s progress or other schoolwide workshops and events. The school website contains information for every event and is setup so that a parent can select their language to support those parents who are non-native English speakers. The school has its own Gmail account. Every teacher, family, and student has access to this. Teachers upload information that is transparent to the entire community and the website content is updated daily. Teachers have individual pages and parents find this an efficient and helpful way to participate in the success of their children. The school videotapes evening and afterschool sessions for parents who are unable to attend. Parents shared their tremendous satisfaction with the communication between school and home. Parents voiced they rarely “Miss out on any events,” and are never kept in the dark about their child’s progress.

- Students are fully aware of their academic progress at all times and are supported towards making the best high school selection. The school has several partnerships with local high schools and begins exposing students to those high schools in seventh-grade. For example, a neighboring High School has established a partnership with the school and they work with seventh and eighth-grade students on developing the skills necessary to attend their high school. Students are prepared for high school by taking several regents exams and high school level courses. This has led to 73 percent of the students being accepted to local, specialized high schools.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams &amp; Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations. Opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles, such as grade and team leaders are embedded throughout the school.

Impact

The instructional capacity of teachers is strengthened which results in instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Teacher voice plays an integral part in key decisions made throughout the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Engaging in Inquiry takes place on a daily basis. A review of teacher team agendas and notes evidenced a structured system that gives all teachers a voice during inquiry. For example, during the sixth and seventh-grade social studies team meeting, teachers engaged in a gallery walk that gave them opportunities to examine student work products by offering noticing’s, and next steps to the presenting teacher. Work samples created by students were reviewed. Teachers used post it notes to identify areas where the students were able to show a deep level of thinking and identify any areas where this was not demonstrated. Inquiry work such as this has helped improve student’s achievement on state assessments. There has been a 4 percent increase in student proficiency rates for 2018, higher than both the city and other comparable schools’ averages.

- Teachers are part of the leadership structures in the school and serve in many capacities. There are teacher leaders for each grade and subject area who support teachers and work with school leaders on a daily basis. The school’s PD team, whose majority of members are teachers has a direct voice in the selection and implementation of all PD throughout the school. Additionally, teacher’s regularly turnkey learning from off campus PD to their colleagues. For example, teachers presented to the entire staff a PD session on various styles of ICT models. During common planning meetings, teachers rotate leadership roles in order to ensure all teachers an opportunity to lead colleagues in inquiry. Additionally, teachers engage in intervisitations with their colleagues to support each other and address areas that have been identified as in need of improvement. Furthermore, there are teacher ambassadors that teachers are able to go to for support and who assist school leaders in helping to disseminate instructional expectations.

- Teachers meet in both horizontal and vertical teams for all subject areas. A review of team meeting agendas evidence that teacher teams regularly meet to examine student work products. The data is used to adjust future lessons. During common planning time the curriculum is adjusted and student work is revisited to ensure their practices are meeting all student-learning needs. Team members stated that they were given flexibility in planning inquiry work that allows them to have “In-depth meetings about student work.” Teacher teamwork has led to the implementation of authentic literature throughout all grades and subject areas. Teachers felt strongly that this was needed to help improve students’ achievement. Decisions such as this have led to improve teaching practices resulting in an increase in math scores for all students on the states math exam.