Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Mark Twain I.S. 239 for the Gifted & Talented
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 21K239

2401 Neptune Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11224

Principal: Karen Ditolla

Dates of Review:
March 13, 2019 - March 14, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Kimberly Bradley
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

Mark Twain I.S. 239 for the Gifted & Talented 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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<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>Well Developed</td>
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### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults

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3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations

### Systems for Improvement

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

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<th>Area</th>
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1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the schools instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products

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<tr>
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<td>Proficient</td>
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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

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<tr>
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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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning

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<tr>
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<td>Proficient</td>
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</table>

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
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings
The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are embedded through various teacher teams and organization of the school by clusters.

Impact
Teacher instructional capacity has strengthened while promoting the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. The schoolwide structure of grade level clusters led by cluster coordinators has played an integral role in focusing on the instructional goals as well as the coherence in supporting student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry teams that meet twice a week to review student work and performance data to identify next steps to support the progress of students. At the beginning of the year, each inquiry team established a problem of practice, identified students they would focus on and determined the data they would collect. Examples of problems of practice include how to best support students who have difficulty with determining the best use of textual evidence and how to move students from passive to active learning. During the observation of an eighth-grade inquiry team, the members of the team analyzed the progress of their target students on the most recent report card and the student-written reflections on their progress. The team noted that while most of their target students made progress, students acknowledged in their reflections that they don’t always follow through on the next steps to meet their goals. As a next step, the team will help students to not only develop goals, but realistic action steps to meet those goals through modeling and providing a template. As a result of the work of inquiry teams, there is evidence of increased student achievement for all learners across the school as measured on recent teacher designed performance tasks in math and English Language Arts (ELA) and data from progress reports and report card reviewed by teacher teams.

- The school has embedded distributed leadership structures including the instructional cabinet team, grade level teams, department teams, data team, new teacher team, and the mastery collaborative team. Grade level and department teams work on aligning rubrics for performance tasks and articulating the expectations for each grade and subject area. The instructional coach supports new teachers with a focus on classroom routines and management assessments to inform instruction. The mastery collaborative team is an interdisciplinary team of teachers who attend professional development sessions on mastery learning and turnkey their new learning with colleagues. A couple of key decisions that have come from these leadership structures include the focus on mastery-based learning and incorporating Habits of Success.

- The school is organized into nine clusters led by a cluster coordinator. Each cluster consists of an ELA, math, science, and social studies teacher that share the same group of students. The cluster meets formally twice a week to discuss student data and anecdotal notes to determine support and interventions. Each cluster is led by a cluster coordinator who coordinates family outreach and serves as one of the main contacts at the school for students and families in addition to school leaders and the guidance team. Teachers, students, and parents all spoke of the impact of this distributed leadership structure and how teachers play an immediate role in making decisions that affect student learning such as identifying ways to address gaps in student mastery across a grade level and supporting the development of Habits of Success.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices reflect an articulated belief that students learn best when various strategies are employed, and students are actively engaged during instruction. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula allowing students to be engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.

Impact
Although it is evident across classrooms that teaching practices reflect articulated beliefs, that students are demonstrating higher-order thinking skills and that there was evidence of multiple entry points for groups of students, this is not yet evident across the vast majority of classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best when annotation and discussion strategies are employed and students are actively engaged during instruction. During an ELA lesson on *To Kill A Mockingbird* that focused on the depiction of hypocrisy through people’s reactions to the trial of Tom Robinson, students discussed in groups the author’s use of dialogue. The teacher provided guided discussion questions and monitored the progress of each small group discussion and the students’ analysis and references to the text. During a social studies lesson on the Stamp Act and the American Revolution, students worked in pairs and small groups with annotated primary and secondary texts of their choice and identified the various perspectives of each document. Students then discussed their findings and wrote their responses on a large group poster.

- Across most classrooms, students had opportunities to be actively engaged in small and whole class discussions and activities. During a sixth-grade science lesson, students rotated through stations and recorded observations about the type of energy transformations they observed for various objects. Based on their observations, students collaboratively designed an experiment based on the questions they raised during the observations. In a seventh-grade math lesson on proportional relationships and linear functions, a warm-up involved students completing a problem on equations and the rate of change to determine the amount of money accumulated in different accounts over time. However, students spent the majority of the time copying the questions and working individually before transitioning to a teacher-centered explanation of the problem with the whole class with a few students called on to respond to teacher-generated questions. As a result, not all students were provided opportunities for engagement and collaboration.

- In most classrooms, teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula. For example, during an ELA lesson, students worked on a culminating project on Ray Bradbury and were provided a list of project choices to select from including creating a diorama of a key scene, creating a movie poster, develop a news broadcast or dramatize one of the author’s stories. Students in the class shared they were given a choice to work in small groups or individually and that they were able to demonstrate their mastery of the learning as they utilized their areas of strength. In an eighth-grade math class, students were in groups as they worked on a lesson on linear equations using two functions. Students rotated through stations that had them interpret graphs, determine the slope of a line given a table of values using arrow arithmetic, and find the slope of a line by looking at a graph as the teachers rotating through the room and helped students individually. While structures such as small group work and discourse cards were provided for students, not all students were engaged throughout the lesson and utilizing support structures.
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

Curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts with a focus on textual analysis and mathematical applications. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in academic tasks across grades and subjects and support mastery learning.

Impact

Curricular alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts results in coherence across grades and subject areas, promoting college and career readiness for all learners. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills require that all students demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Courses, lesson plans, unit plans, and curriculum maps reflect full integration of the instructional shifts embedded in Common Core Learning Standards across content areas. For example, lesson plans in ELA emphasize the value of text-based evidence and close textual analysis. An example of the inclusion of the ELA instructional shift of grounding reading and writing in textual evidence is a culminating project on the writings of Ray Bradbury where students must demonstrate their learning of summary and determining importance, figurative language, symbolism, mood and tone, inference, and text connections. One example of the inclusion of the mathematics instructional shift to increase rigor is a lesson that requires students to analyze the relationship between a square’s side length and its corresponding perimeter and area as they apply their understanding of ratios, rates, and proportions and build on their previous knowledge of linear functions.

- A review of curricular documents demonstrates academic tasks that promote college and career readiness for all students. A sixth-grade math lesson plan includes a task in which students apply their understanding of ratios, rates, and percent as they work on designing a park for their neighborhood and have to consider the constraints of budget and size as they determine the amenities they want to include. A seventh-grade social studies lesson plan asked students to analyze primary and secondary documents related to the Stamp Act and consider the multiple perspectives of the people impacted by this legislation. A sixth-grade science lesson plan describes the lab procedure students will follow as they determine the chemical formula for different compounds.

- Lesson plans consistently challenge students to utilize rigorous habits in the course of instruction. Learning objective statements in lesson plans include, “Students will be able to apply concepts of energy transformation in order to conduct an experiment and analyze how energy is transferred from one object to another,” and “Students will understand the colonial demand to have representation in their government and evaluate multiple perspectives and the influence of propaganda.” Additionally, lesson plans include opportunities for students to consistently reflect on their learning and identify additional questions they have. Lesson plans consistently detailed high-level questions. Examples of higher-order questions found in curricular documents include, “Why should we use proportional relationships to help us solve real-world problems? In what ways can proportional relationships be expressed? How is energy conserved in a transformation?” Lesson plans involving students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) include modeled responses, modified worksheets, graphic organizers, the previewing of content and academic vocabulary, the use of visuals and graphics, and leveled primary and secondary texts.
Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use performance assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school’s curricula and focus on mastery learning. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact
Assessment practices provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, samples of student work products showed teacher written actionable feedback directing students to the steps they should take to strengthen their work. One example includes “Excellent work. I like how you visualize the value of the fractions. For future reference, make sure you are labeling your models and showing the equations/expressions that match. Share your calculation and process.” Another example reads, “This is a very factual argumentative essay. In the future, try using a more compelling topic sentence to pull your reader in. In addition, you should have a slightly different format for your essay. Your opening paragraph should just state your argument, and the body should look at these ideas deeper. Use the conclusion to restate your broader argument.” Finally, another example reads, “You did a great job incorporating feedback to create a clear claim and add direct evidence from the documents. Next step: continue working on adding your analysis with the direct evidence.”

- Across classrooms, rubrics and checklists are used as tools of support for student growth. Rubrics that are aligned with the curricula, along with checklists, are used across grades and content areas. Examples include a dynamic character project rubric, a social studies argument essay rubric, a Socratic seminar discussion rubric and observation checklist, and a persuasive debate rubric. An example of student reflection states, “At this point in the year, I mastered the use of context clues. For the remainder of the year, I can try learning more strategies for choosing answers and improve study habits.” Evidence of students’ use of these tools is posted on student work examples and reported by the students who shared that they receive feedback from both teachers and self-reflect on the progress they made on an assignment in the form of glows, grows and next steps.

- The administration of a baseline performance assessment in ELA and math at the beginning of the year across grades and content areas provides data about the skill level of each student and is used in the planning of instruction by cluster teams. Teachers also collaboratively design performance tasks with an emphasis on mastery on a grade level skill. Teachers also use online tools and student work portfolios to monitor the progress of students over the year. Students are provided opportunities to retake or revise performance tasks to demonstrate mastery based on teacher feedback as well as reflecting on their progress toward mastery. Teachers include these reflections in their tracking of student progress and instructional adjustments. As a result of using common assessments and providing multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery based on feedback and reflection, all students are demonstrating increased mastery across grades and content areas as evident on end of unit performance tasks.
Additional Finding

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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 consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff to support the instructional focus on mastery based learning. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations to families connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

Communication and professional development around high expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability. Partnerships with families support students in their progress toward college and career readiness through the dual focus on academics and talent programs.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the standard for professionalism and high-quality instruction. Additionally, school leaders provide professional development on their expectations related to mastery learning and habits of success. Some of these expectations include the revising of performance tasks using a mastery rubric rather than traditional number grades, revising homework to ensure they are meaningful and not compliance driven, and incorporating the Habits of Success into student expectations. Language from the school’s vision statement states, “All members of our school community will share accountability for creating a positive, supportive and nurturing environment, and for achieving successful student outcomes through high quality, relevant learning experiences.” The instructional cabinet consisting of department and school leaders meet regularly to analyze the implementation of mastery learning in performance tasks and inquiry work happening in cluster teams to determine needed adjustments. Teachers shared it was a shared decision to focus schoolwide on mastery based learning. These structures that communicate and support high expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability.

- Partnerships with families support students in their progress toward college and career readiness. A strong parent association works closely with school leaders and leads fundraising efforts to support the school’s dual focus on strong academics and talent programs. School leaders and staff communicate expectations through the use of email, text message, monthly calendars, and the school’s website. Parents and students can also monitor grades and attendance through an online grading program. Parents are aware of the high school application process and requirements through meetings and workshops provided by school staff and praised the school’s focus on executive functions and Habits of Success. Parents who had multiple children attend the school also spoke about the smooth transition their older children made to high school and attributed that to the high expectations and experiences their children had at the school.

- Throughout classrooms, offices and hallways, Habits of Success posters communicate the school’s expectations for students and staff including, “Show up on time, be prepared with materials and assignments, show effort even when facing a challenge, be an active participant, demonstrate good character, and be honest, respectful and trustworthy.” Both students and parents referred to not only to the Habits of Success, but also the class contracts they receive at the beginning of the year for every class that outlines the expectations, class requirements, and grading policy. Parents praised the communication from cluster coordinators about the progress of their child and supported the schoolwide shift on mastery based learning. Parents and students spoke of the preparation students receive for high school and beyond through Regents courses and preparation courses for the Specialized High School Admissions Test.
**Findings**

School leaders support teacher development, including those new to the profession, with frequent classroom observation cycles. Prompt written feedback captures teachers' strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

**Impact**

Formal and informal classroom visits result in written feedback for teachers that makes clear the expectations for teacher practice and supports the development of teachers.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Each rated item is supported with specific detailed evidence from the observed class to support the rating. School leadership develops an observation schedule with each school leader assigned to a specific department. During school cabinet meetings and central office coaching visits, school leaders discuss the progress of the teachers they supervise and work on calibrating observations. Teachers are also encouraged to participate in classroom intervisitations that include the collection of low inference notes, completing a peer to peer observation form, and writing a reflection on how the visit impacted their thinking about their classroom practices. As a result of frequent observations and feedback teachers are showing improvements in supporting student participation as evident in *Advance* reports.

- A structure is in place to support the growth of new teachers, including working with a mentor and attending monthly new teacher mentoring meetings. Topics discussed during these meetings include an overview of the tenure process, school expectations and procedures, and what to focus on during their first years of teaching. The school’s instructional coach has developed a nuts and bolts of teaching professional development series that new teachers attend. Sessions focus on using wait time effectively to increase student participation and designing questions and a comfortable classroom environment that supports all students in feeling included including developing expectations for discussions and not allowing a few students to dominate the conversation.

- At the beginning and end of the year, school leaders meet with each teacher to review their professional goals, feedback they have received during the year during informal and formal observations and identify specific ways to support their continued growth. Teachers complete written reflections about their areas of strength, areas for growth, a professional goal they want to work toward, and specific steps they will take to achieve their goal. One example of a professional goal stated, “My goal is to develop materials and methods to allow students who may not have mastered skills to continue practicing and eventually show mastery, even after we have finished that topic area in class.” One example of feedback states, “The teacher’s activities included several higher order questions for the students to work on in their group. The students discussed and explained their reasoning with one another as well as the teacher.” Another example of feedback states, “The teacher provided a variety of appropriate materials and resources and students initiated several higher-order questions. Please continue to implement these effective instructional strategies.” A third example of feedback states, “You planned for misconceptions and your lesson was differentiated for all students.” Teachers reported that the feedback and opportunities to reflect has impacted their professional growth.