Quality Review Report

2018-2019

New Heights Middle School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 17K722
790 East New York Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203

Principal: Ativia Sandusky

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

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

New Heights Middle School serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
<td></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><strong>Additional Finding</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></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><strong>Area of Focus</strong></td>
<td>Developing</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><strong>Additional Finding</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
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</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Proficient</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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<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: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness with families.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability exists around teachers’ support of each other in ensuring that teacher-team meetings and information sharing protocols are effective. Information sharing and successful partnering with families through online platforms and sessions support students in their academic progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are shared with staff through presentations at faculty meetings and through a variety of tools and platforms, including a staff handbook, newsletters, emails, and memoranda. For example, the mission and vision statements, expectations regarding assessment and grading, curriculum and instruction design and delivery, as well as day-to-day responsibilities are detailed in the faculty handbook. Weekly newsletters are used to keep faculty abreast of upcoming events, assessments, immediate programming concerns, and professional learning (PL) opportunities. The school community’s culture of mutual accountability is evident in teachers’ reliance on their colleagues to arrive at teacher-team meetings prepared to engage in data analysis, inquiry of student work, and review of the different strategies teachers use to address students’ various needs. Additionally, paraprofessionals begin the year with a session during which they use a protocol to transparently share the strategies that they used while working with their students during the prior year so that when their respective students are assigned to a new paraprofessional, the student receives continuous service.

- High expectations are shared with families through multiple tools, such as the monthly parent newsletter and an online gradebook platform that enables real-time grade-sharing. In addition, events such as parent-engagement workshops, back-to-school and end-of-year events, School Leadership Team events, and two annual student-led report card review conferences, have helped parents stay abreast of high expectations, events, and opportunities for themselves and their children. Parents spoke about how their use of these tools has empowered them to support their children’s academic progress while at home. One parent shared that she was able to help her son complete a research project for which the subject was to be a famous African-American. Another parent shared that after being unable to assist her child with a project about the Native American people who lived in New York prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas, she contacted the teacher, who then promptly replied and answered all of her questions about the assignment.

- Parents serve on an Academic Parent-Teacher Team (APTT). The work of this team uncovered parents’ desire for a deep experience with the curricula and teaching strategies currently employed at the school. In response, school leaders and teachers planned and held a Curriculum Night event, during which parents visited stations that focused on math, English Language Arts (ELA), science, social students, technology, and the school’s robotics program. Additional information shared at this event included strategies designed to help parents prepare to support their children with information about the different protocols used at the school for writing short responses and complete essays, identifying inferences, citing evidence, using context clues to define challenging words, and answering multi-step math problems.
Findings

Teaching practices are beginning to reflect a set of beliefs that students learn best when teachers explicitly model the skills and strategies that students are expected to employ. Student discussions inconsistently reflect high levels of student participation.

Impact

Student progress is limited by teaching practices that do not regularly include explicit modeling and due to the inconsistent facilitation of student-to-student discussion.

Supporting Evidence

- In some classrooms, teachers explicitly modeled the skills that students were expected to utilize during the lesson. For example, during a grade-seven math class, the teacher modeled how to find the amount of the markup or markdown of products when shopping by using different methods to find the percent of a number. In a grade-seven ELA class, the teacher modeled how to analyze a poem by identifying and interpreting symbols, identifying the author’s tone, and determining theme using the poem, “The Rose That Grew from Concrete,” by Tupac Shakur. Similarly, during another grade-seven ELA class, the teacher modeled how to identify the tone of a poem using “Deadly Winter,” by Rachel McCurry.

- There were also classes in which explicit teacher modeling did not occur. For example, in a grade-eight ELA class, two student groups were tasked with portraying a scene from To Kill A Mockingbird using the tableau process, which involves students standing motionless in creating a scene while being prepared to present information upon request by observers. Although the teacher described the tableau process, there was no explicit modeling of how to employ this process or what it would look like. In a grade-six ELA class, the teacher provided models of poetic statements without explicitly modeling how to write them. There were additional examples of classes during which there was no explicit modeling in math, science, and social studies lessons.

- During a grade-seven math class, students helped their peers within their table groups. Sixth-grade students worked with partners to prepare presentations on the Renaissance. Additionally, during a grade-seven ELA class, students worked within their table groups to read a poem and identify the tone through language analysis. However, there were also multiple missed opportunities for students to conduct peer-to-peer discussions. For example, during a grade-eight ELA lesson, answers to questions regarding the presence of compassion within the class text were elicited from individual students, with all answers subsequently being directed to the teacher, leading to limited engagement among students. Identical teacher-centered questioning processes were observed in math and science classes.
### Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rating:</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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#### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills for all students.

#### Impact

Curricula build coherence and promote college and career readiness through embedded activities that require students to ground their work in textual evidence, and use multiple methods to solve equations. All students are tasked with analyzing and constructing knowledge in ELA, math, social studies, and science.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Alignment to the Common Core and content area standards, where applicable, as well as integration of the instructional shifts, are evident across the curricula. The shift focused on students’ supporting their arguments with textual evidence is noted in a variety of lesson plans. For example, a grade-eight ELA lesson plan indicates that students are to make inferences while reading *To Kill A Mockingbird* and support their arguments with textual evidence. ELA lesson plans across grades contain similar activities that require students to use evidence from the text to support their arguments as to tone, mood, and the effectiveness of language use. Similarly, a grade-six social studies lesson plan includes an activity in which students are required to cite evidence from primary and secondary sources. In addition, multiple lesson plans include a focus on the relevant academic vocabulary that students would need in order to successfully meet the lessons’ objectives.

- Integration of the math instructional shifts is also evident in curricula. A grade-seven math lesson plan includes an activity in which students are to calculate percentages in order to determine how much in tips they should give to waiters. A grade-six math lesson plan requires that students find a series of points on a grid in order to strengthen their understanding. Additionally, a grade-eight math lesson plan indicates that students are to use multiple methods to solve linear equations.

- There are multiple examples of rigorous habits and skills emphasized in lesson plans across grades and subjects for classes that have a mix of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. For example, students are tasked with solving multistep ratio and percentage problems in a grade-seven math lesson plan. Eighth-grade students are to study dominant and recessive traits, along with the possible genotypes and phenotypes that would occur with different gene combinations, in a science lesson designed to build students’ understanding of how people’s traits are determined by genetics.

- Similarly, a grade-eight ELA lesson plan indicates that students will analyze a work of literature to find evidence of the author’s message with regard to taking a stand. A grade-six social studies lesson plan includes an activity in which students will explore primary and secondary sources in order to determine how the concept of change is vital to understanding the Renaissance. Sixth-grade students are tasked with writing poetry and using multiple literary devices in order to portray themselves. Seventh-grade students are tasked with studying a poet’s use of symbols and tone to convey a message through analysis of the poem, “The Rose that Grew from Concrete,” by Tupac Shakur.
## Additional Finding

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

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and checklists that are aligned with the school’s curricula to inform feedback to students. Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals.

### Impact

Students utilize teachers’ actionable feedback to increase their achievement. Teachers use data from online and teacher-designed assessments to adjust student groups, program Academic Intervention Services (AIS), and make informed decisions regarding the identification and use of supplementary resources.

### Supporting Evidence

- Student work samples across subject areas contain teacher-written actionable feedback that students use to improve their work. For example, students are advised on written assignments to use additional text-based evidence to support their claims and to analyze the evidence that they use. Students were also advised to pay close attention to their use of writing mechanics, such as indenting each paragraph and ending it with a concluding sentence, avoiding word repetition, and using appropriate punctuation. Similarly, feedback that guides students to include additional evidence to support their claims and to analyze that evidence was noted on samples of social studies work.

- Actionable teacher feedback written on math assignments focused students on the value of writing out all of the steps taken to solve a problem, and identifying the equation embedded within a word problem. Other examples of feedback drew students’ attention to the benefit of using more math-specific vocabulary and multiple methods to arrive at answers, and to explain the processes they used to arrive at those answers. Students were also reminded to check their work and use alternate strategies as a method for verifying correct answers. Additionally, feedback offered to students on physical education class assignments showed that they are being reminded to show all of the steps taken in calculating heart rates before, during, and after an activity, and to include a measure of intensity exerted during the activity to improve the heart-rate monitoring chart.

- School leaders and teachers use the data from common assessments to form student groups, determine curricular adjustments, and decide on schoolwide instructional foci. For example, data analysis showed that students needed support in the use of academic vocabulary to answer extended response prompts in math, as well as strengthen students’ comfort with high-level non-fiction. This led to decisions to add two online resources that both focus on vocabulary acquisition and assign non-fiction readings that are differentiated based on individual student’s reading level. Common assessments, administered through online and paper formats, determine students' progress in math, ELA, and science. The social studies common assessments administered at the school are designed in-house.
**Additional Finding**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

Written feedback issued after classroom observations accurately captures teachers’ strengths, challenges, and next steps using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. An effective system drives the use of teacher observation data in the design and facilitation of PL, as well as informs decisions regarding teachers’ assignments and succession plans.

**Impact**

Written feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practice and the supports available to help teachers meet them. Additionally, teacher observation data informs the PL focus for the entire faculty.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Observation reports include feedback that captures teachers’ strengths and weaknesses, and is accompanied by next steps teachers should take in order to improve their practice and student success. For example, in one report, the teacher was praised for delivering a lesson that included real-world examples and differentiated activities. Feedback to this teacher was focused on checking for student understanding during the lesson and making on-the-spot adjustments when necessary. Another report highlighted the teacher’s strategic planning for flexible student groups. Feedback offered to this teacher was focused on the value of modeling the strategies that students would be expected to employ during the lesson. Other examples of feedback include advice on how to create and employ student-friendly checklists that would help students remain on task and focus on a given activity’s expectations, the design and use of differentiated materials, and the use of protocols to ensure that all students are participating in classroom discussions.

- In addition to the feedback resulting from official classroom observations, school leaders share actionable feedback with teachers via email from unofficial classroom visits. One email included advice on how to purposefully have students take note of a given lesson’s success criteria so that they could hold themselves accountable. Another email included specific directions on how to increase student engagement in peer-to-peer discussion, along with attachments that detail the steps involved with two different discussion protocols. Other examples of feedback include advice on planning lessons that provide extensions of learning for students who meet the lesson’s objectives before others, planning for a greater integration of paraprofessionals in order to maximize students’ opportunities for academic growth, and ensuring that each station has clear learning objectives when planning and facilitating station-learning activities.

- PL has been designed and delivered to meet teachers’ needs, with a primary focus on assessment practices. Agendas show that teachers have received PL on how to read and analyze schoolwide data, plan and implement checking-for-understanding strategies during lessons, and use the data from formative and summative assessments to design student groups and differentiate instruction. Other topics addressed through PL, which have been driven by analysis of classroom observation data, include designing coherent instruction, increasing student engagement, and facilitating student-to-student discussions. Additionally, school leaders have used the data from official and unofficial observations to make decisions regarding succession plans, and developing teacher leaders so that their coordination of programs and mentoring of teachers continuously grows.
Additional Finding

### Quality Indicator: 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development

**Rating:** Proficient

#### 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. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

#### Impact

Teachers' collaborations within content-based teams strengthen their instructional capacity. Teachers have a voice in key decisions, such as in the adjustment of academic intervention programming, and Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) program structure.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participate in teams that are organized by content area. The math team looked at student work presented by a grade-seven teacher. Teachers initially parsed the focus standards into two categories, entitled Knowledge/Concepts and Skills. Teachers then used student responses to a constructed response problem to design a rubric level-four exemplar. The facilitator then shared the State-provided exemplar, which teachers compared with the exemplars they had just designed and identified key words from the constructed response prompt that might confuse students. Teachers then analyzed student work samples that had earned rubric ratings of zero, one, and two. In groups of three, teachers then detailed what students did well, and the steps that students would need to take in order to earn the higher-level rating.

- Agendas show that the science team has met to plan the administration of a mock Regents High School Examination in Living Environment to eighth-grade students, upcoming lab-class activities, and assessment of sixth-grade students to determine which could be programmed to take Living Environment in the seventh grade. Science teachers have also planned after-school Living Environment class sessions, as well as integrated two curricular sources in order to purposefully select activities that best meet their students' demonstrated needs. Similarly, agendas show that the humanities teacher team has met to analyze student work so that learning gaps could be identified and next steps designed to address those gaps. Meeting agendas also show that student work was analyzed to guide student grouping and differentiated tasks were planned so that each group is challenged to achieve higher performance levels.

- Teachers have a voice in making key decisions that affect learning at the school. For example, ELA and social studies teachers advocated to adjust their common planning time so that they could begin meeting as a multi-disciplinary team beginning with the current school year. The entire school schedule was adjusted so that this could happen. Teachers’ voice played a role in the decision to increase students’ academic intervention scheduling. Teacher voice also was key to restructuring the PBIS program so that this year, the store at which students could spend their earned scholar dollars inhabited a dedicated space, as opposed to its location on a rolling cart during the previous school year. Additionally, teachers serve on the instructional cabinet that meets weekly with school leaders and collaboratively answered a survey that was used to help design PL offerings for the current school year.