Quality Review Report

2018-2019

The STAR Academy - P.S.63
Elementary 01M063
121 East 3 Street
Manhattan
NY 10009

Principal: Darlene Cameron

Dates of Review:
May 30, 2019 - May 31, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Edward Hazen
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

The STAR Academy - P.S.63 serves students in grade PK through grade 5. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</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>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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 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 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>
</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>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<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>Additional Finding</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>
</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>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Area of Celebration

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

**Findings**

School leaders and staff maintain a positive school culture that includes partnerships with families to promote student ownership of their social-emotional and academic learning. Structures, including student interest inventories, are in place to ensure that student voice is valued and included in school and classroom decisions.

**Impact**

The staff promotes an inclusive culture that welcomes student voice and supports progress toward the schoolwide goals. Support for student learning, professional development (PD) for staff, and family outreach efforts result in the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders and staff embody their theory of action for building a positive school culture in the schoolwide Get in the Game program. The program was adopted to promote engagement and a growth mindset among students and staff. It aligns with the core beliefs that students should be active participants in their education and community to become life-long learners and active citizens. Lead teachers provided turnkey training to staff and reported that the program fosters student independence and self-regulation, a primary school goal critical to students’ academic and social-emotional success. To this end, school leaders and staff created a system of reinforcement for behaviors that connect to the school mantra of STAR Academy: Self-Managed, Team Player, Accountable, and Respectful. Staff conspicuously display Get in the Game posters in classrooms and around the school that provide specific examples of what it means to be a STAR. Thus, the school’s culture and theory of action support progress towards school goals.

- To include students’ input in decision-making, school leaders hold focus groups with students to determine what improvement or changes they would like. In addition, each student completes a reflection sheet after each unit of study to provide feedback to school leaders and teachers on how to make lessons more meaningful and engaging. Based on students’ interests, staff have added informational and narrative texts that they requested to read in class. Additionally, school leaders and staff decided to adopt Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) schoolwide to ensure that resources and materials used in units of study are reflective of the diversity of the student body, are engaging to students, and celebrate the multicultural make-up of the school.

- The school staff partners with families to provide them with PD and supports that have resulted in their children adopting effective academic and personal behaviors. Parents reported that the school hosts extensive workshops for families that have been extremely helpful in reinforcing positive and effective behaviors at home, including time management and perseverance when engaging with school work. Similarly, students stated that teachers’ use of the online ClassDojo has been effective in helping them manage their behaviors in class because, “We work hard to make sure we are earning all of our points.” To further promote student self-regulation, each classroom has a reflection corner where students can go if they are feeling frustrated. Students who may require Therapeutic Crisis Intervention and Support (TCIS) can go to the school reflection room, where they will be assisted by support staff if they are exhibiting emotional duress. Staff reported that the number of negative incidents that could potentially disrupt student learning has declined as a result. During a classroom visit, a student who was exhibiting untoward behavior was observed taking a “time away” from the literacy circle but was able to return on his own to the group once he had regained his composure so that he could earn his points for the activity. This was also evidenced by data that showed the number of students requiring TCIS declined from September 2018 to May 2019.
Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to the school’s belief about how students learn best. Pedagogy consistently utilizes strategies such as the workshop model learning structure, questioning, and discussions to promote high levels of thinking and engagement for a diversity of learners.

Impact

Across grades and content areas, teaching practices that consistently reflect school-identified best practices provide most students with challenging learning tasks requiring the use of critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving. However, engagement of higher achievers was not consistent across classes nor did all students demonstrate ownership of their work by contributing equally to group tasks or discussions.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s articulated vision of creating critical thinkers and problem solvers through rigorous learning is evident across grade levels and content areas. Instructional foci to meet the schoolwide beliefs about how students learn best, including reciprocal teaching, student discourse, and differentiated instruction to address individualized learning styles, needs, and modalities, were identified by school leaders and staff. In addition, these practices were observed during classroom visits, with students having access to scaffolds such as manipulatives, graphic organizers, and visuals. However, these practices were not prevalent across the vast majority of classrooms visited. While instruction was differentiated in some classes to allow multiple entry points into the lesson, in other classes there were no scaffolds or specialized instructional strategies utilized for top achieving students.

- In most classes visited, teachers used strategies such as inquiry, collaborative learning, questioning, and discussions to promote cognitive challenge and engagement. Teachers design rigorous activities and use scaffolding techniques to provide multiple entry points into lessons and academic tasks for a variety of learners. To begin a second-grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) writing lesson, the teachers modeled how to use text evidence to support opinions using the RADD strategy (restate, answer, detail, detail). Students then transitioned to ability-based groups to work on opinion writing essays with a peer while also receiving one-on-one coaching from the teachers, as needed. For students that struggle with fine motor skills, double-sized lined paper or tablets were available to differentiate their writing responses, such as by using a digital option. A similar structure and protocol were observed in a math class, where the teacher first modeled how to use a chunk and chew strategy to break down a math problem. Following this, students worked on differentiated math tasks in ability-based pairs while the teacher checked-in with students and provided one-on-one instruction to those who needed further support.

- The level of structured group work that holds students individually accountable for engaging in group tasks and contributing to the work of the cooperative learning groups varied across classrooms. In a fifth-grade reading class, students were asked to work with an elbow partner to determine a problem in the story and questions they might ask one another. However, not all students shared the problem they had identified, and some students were observed having one-sided or short conversations with their peers. One pair opted not to participate in a discussion, therefore evidencing a lack of ownership of the turn and talk discussion. Thus, all students do not yet engage in high levels of discourse across the vast majority of classes.
Findings

The school leaders and faculty ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards through the implementation of the instructional shifts across grades and subjects. Rigorous academic tasks are planned to engage students in challenging metacognitive tasks, leading to improved student work and high levels of discussion.

Impact

Strategic planning of curricula and academic tasks results in coherence across grades and supports college and career readiness for all students, including students with diverse learning needs. Instructional shifts, including citing evidence from multiple sources, are emphasized across all disciplines.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula across grades and subjects indicates evidence of teacher teamwork to strategically integrate the Common Core and instructional shifts in English Language Arts (ELA), math, social studies, and science. Across subjects and grade levels, students are required to develop arguments and cite sufficient supporting textual evidence to justify their stances on an issue when making a claim or defending an argument. Teachers also plan themed interdisciplinary units of study incorporating social studies, current events, and social justice issues, allowing students to engage in high-interest, text-based discussions and write from sources to make arguments while promoting the adoption of academic vocabulary. For example, in social studies students engage in argumentative writing about equity in the community, City, and their own lives in relation to social injustices occurring nationwide. To foster higher levels of classroom discussion, teachers have identified prompts that encourage accountable talk and the use of academic vocabulary to make students’ thinking visible, as evidenced by a review of pacing guides and lesson plans.

- Staff members meet weekly to work in collaborative teams to review and revise pacing guides, units of study, and lesson plans to ensure they include rigorous tasks accessible to all students. Teachers analyze student work samples and assessment data, including mid- and end-of-unit tests, student conferencing notes, independent reading assessments, and running-records results, to refine lesson plans and curricula, plan instructional groups, and include supports, such as scaffolds and differentiated tasks. The school leaders and universal literacy coach meet with teachers and teams to examine the impact of the grade-level teamwork, such as the inclusion of entry points into lessons for students with disabilities. A grade level team was observed analyzing work samples from a struggling student to determine supports that could be planned, such as having the student highlight key words in a math problem. Revised curricula are housed in the school’s online platform so that all staff members have access, including support staff such as ICT teams and Occupational Teachers (OT). These practices result in coherence and cognitive engagement across the vast majority of grades and classes.

- A review of meeting minutes and agendas indicates that grade-team meetings focus on creating student-centered lessons providing whole-class and individualized supports, allowing multiple access points into the lesson through differentiation of tasks and enrichment opportunities for higher achieving students. Likewise, ICT teacher teams meet to plan lessons based on the needs of students to ensure multiple entry points, scaffolding, and differentiation using the Universal Design for Learning model. Additionally, support teachers use data to create intervention plans for students who struggle and revisit interventions that are put in place to assess students’ progress toward meeting benchmarks. The interventions require purposeful planning so that students performing below the benchmark receive timely, targeted intervention services.
### Findings
The vast majority of teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that align with the curricula to monitor student progress toward mastery. Teachers analyze assessment data, including conference notes, to track student progress, make instructional decisions, and adjust curricula and academic tasks.

### Impact
The use of common rubrics, checklists, and assessments provides actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers. Teachers make informed adjustments to curriculum and instruction and design interventions for students with differing needs so that students demonstrate increased mastery.

### Supporting Evidence
- Teachers use assessments, rubrics, and checklists to provide timely and accurate feedback to students and their families on their progress and next steps, resulting in improvement in their writing. Based on the language of the rubric and actionable feedback from teachers, students who scored a level two or three on a four-point argumentative writing rubric were able to articulate what was absent from their writing and/or what would be needed to reach level four, or mastery, on their essays. For example, students stated that they had to include stronger textual evidence to support their claims and ensure accuracy in their grammar. Students reported that, as a result of teacher feedback, they made sure to watch their grammar and include sufficient evidence in their next writing projects. Students further reported that the use of checklists is very helpful “because it shows you what you left out or what you have to include.” Thus, teacher feedback is having a positive impact on student writing.

- Teachers and teacher teams use a variety of assessments to adjust curricula and plan scaffolds and activities that support all learners, including those performing in the lowest third and students with disabilities. Teachers’ analysis of State math assessment data led to the decision to adopt math discussions to have students think meta-cognitively when applying math strategies and to include more opportunities for students to build math fluency. A review of meeting minutes and agendas indicates that teacher teams meet frequently to monitor progress toward mastery for all students, including students with disabilities. Teacher team agendas and meeting minutes indicate that teams analyze students’ short constructed responses from writing tasks to identify patterns and trends among student responses and next steps for instruction. For example, to provide students with more processing time to become better at solving multi-step math problems and think more about their writing, teachers adopted the chunk and chew methodology for teaching content and concepts schoolwide.

- To create a clear picture of student progress across grades and subjects, several data points are used to identify students performing at, below, and above grade level and to develop tiered interventions that accelerate learning for all students and close achievement gaps. Grade-level teams analyze multiple data sources, such as Measures of Student Learning, Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) running records, and end-of-unit writing tasks. They use this analysis to determine instructional levels and provide student groups with differentiated academic tasks and materials within their zones of proximal development. This also allows teachers to plan interventions via small-group instruction with the classroom teacher or more intensive intervention with specialized support staff, including additional Academic Intervention Services (AIS) time. As a result, the percentage of students with disabilities meeting proficiency on the State ELA assessment increased from 16 percent in 2017 to 26 percent in 2018.
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 and teachers use both traditional means and an online platform to communicate high expectations to students and their families. An established culture for learning promotes student ownership of their educational experiences.

Impact

Systems of accountability for students and partnerships with families ensure that all students, including high needs subgroups, are aware of their progress toward college and career readiness. Strong parent participation in the progress of their children results in all students being prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- Effective strategies for communicating high expectations to families ensure that all students remain on track to meet or exceed those expectations. To promote college and career readiness, the school provides opportunities for students, like applying for daily jobs as Cafeteria Rangers, responsible for reducing cafeteria waste. As a result, students and parents reported that they are aware of the school's expectations to prepare all students for the secondary level and colleges and careers. Families receive regular updates on student academic and behavioral progress through traditional means, such as report cards and parent-teacher conferences. The majority of parents stated that their children's teachers are very accessible, and they communicate with them through a variety of means, including emails. Parents expressed appreciation that all teachers send out a monthly class newsletter and use ClassDojo, giving parents daily online updates about their children’s academic progress and social-emotional growth as well as information about upcoming events and workshops, ensuring that parents are always aware of what is happening.

- Parents reported that the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is very involved with the school and that school leaders and staff are committed to having families become active partners in their children's learning. The School Leadership Team works with the PTA to identify prioritized student needs and implement programs to support student progress toward increasing academic achievement. Promotion of social-emotional development is through the schoolwide Get in the Game program that teaches the importance of perseverance through a series of growth mindset-focused lessons. Because of the expectation for students to interact positively and consider the choices they make, parents reported that their children are better able to self-regulate their behavior at school and home. A review of correspondence from school leaders and staff indicates that they invite parents to school workshops and family engagement events to learn how to support their children's social-emotional and academic growth at home. Parents reported that these sessions have given them the skills necessary to assist their children academically at home, especially in math.

- The school staff has a set of clear, systematic structures, such as one-on-one student conferencing with teachers, that ensures students are monitoring their progress toward their reading and writing goals. In addition, most students know their reading levels and ways to improve their literacy skills, such as reading at home every night for at least forty-five minutes. Other interviewed students confirmed that teachers hold them to high expectations and that they feel that they are being adequately prepared for their next level. One fifth grade student reported that learners are ready for middle school “because of the feedback teachers give us and they are already teaching us sixth grade skills that we are going to need.” This was evidenced by a 14 percent increase in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting proficiency on the State ELA exam, from 40 percent in 2017 to 54 percent in 2018.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers analyze student data and student work samples and engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations to embed rigorous tasks into lesson plans and units of study.

Impact

Across grades, teacher teams’ use of a structured protocol to systematically analyze data and student work products has resulted in coherent implementation of the Common Core and instructional shifts, including adding complex texts across subjects, leading to strengthened teacher instructional capacity and improved student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers engage in professional collaborations to promote the implementation of the Common Core, adopt identified instructional best practices and protocols, and build schoolwide instructional coherence. The need to promote higher levels of student discussion led to teachers adopting common protocols, such as turn and talks and higher order thinking skills (HOTS) questioning strategies, asking probing questions to improve student discourse. Similarly, the teacher teams identified the use of exemplars and the workshop model as the most effective ways to support the diversity of learners in the school, including students with disabilities.

- Teacher teams use a structured protocol to review student work and analyze assessment data to make curricula and lesson plan changes. This work aligns to the schoolwide goals of improving students’ ability to make claims with sufficient supporting textual evidence and increasing the level of student discourse across content areas. The teams engage in inquiry work to examine the impact specific instructional strategies have on providing entry points into lessons to increase student engagement and achievement. Teachers make changes to units of study and lessons and implement strategies into classroom practice, then reconvene to assess which practices had the greatest impact on student learning. Strategies that are identified as effective in providing access to content for students to elevate their skills are then shared schoolwide. For instance, the common practice of having students use RADD to justify their stances on an argument is embedded into units of study, lesson plans, and many speaking and writing tasks. Similarly, teacher team inquiry work to determine why students struggled to solve multi-step word problems led to the adoption of the acronym, DR. QVOSAC in math classes: Do Read the problem, answer the Question, Visualize the problem, choose the Operation, Solve the problem, Answer the question, and Check your work. Thus, the work of the teams results in schoolwide coherence of pedagogical practices.

- Grade level teams meet weekly to analyze student assessment data and student work products to identify patterns and trends and devise strategies to help close identified achievement gaps. Use of a variety of assessments and progress monitoring tools, such as F&P running records, student observation and conference notes, exit tickets, and end-of-unit assessments, determines changes to student groups for in-class targeted instruction or pull-out strategic reading interventions, helping all students to meet benchmarks. Grade teams also consistently analyze and disaggregate data so members can plan scaffolds and additional individualized or group supports, such as differentiated texts at students’ reading levels. Data is also used to identify students in need of additional AIS, so that they are prepared for State exams. These practices resulted in a 15 percent increase in the overall percentage of students meeting proficiency on the State math assessment, from 41 percent in 2017 to 56 percent in 2018.