Quality Review Report

2018-2019

STEM Institute of Manhattan
Elementary 03M241
240 West 113 Street
Manhattan
NY 10026

Principal: Marcia Hendricks

Dates of Review:
May 29, 2019 - May 30, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Debra Tasioudis
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

STEM Institute of Manhattan serves students in grade K through grade 5. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### 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>Developing</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>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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

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

### Systems for Improvement

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

Teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that are beginning to connect to inquiry and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. While teachers are sharing instructional strategies with one another during inquiry, there is analysis of student work products an emerging process.

### Impact

Collaborations are beginning to result in improved teacher practice and increased student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- **Most teachers are engaged in professional collaborations and are members of teacher teams.** During a kindergarten and first-grade common planning meeting, the teachers along with the instructional coach, reviewed student-writing tasks from a narrative writing pre-unit assessment. The prompt stated, "Write the best small moment story you can write. Make sure you: make a beginning for your story, show what happened in order, use details to help readers picture your story, and make an ending for your story." The task included teacher dictation of the story, students’ drawing and writing, and a rubric connected to the school’s reading and writing curricula. Review of the work was based on how the students performed on the assessment. The team members worked together to develop glows and grows for each group. In their review, teachers noted many things that students could and could not do, such as use of punctuation, use of letters in words, using details, writing introductions, and labeling pictures. The coach then guided the team to develop next instructional steps based on their analysis. Each teacher listed practices they could immediately implement. While this process of looking at student work was evident in previous team meeting notes, how these changes are incorporated into teacher lesson plans, curricular artifacts or teaching practice was not evident, thus impacting some teacher collaborations.

- **The teachers developed next steps before the conclusion of their team meeting.** They decided that creating scripts and acting them out, adding feeling words, labeling characters, creating anchor charts, using laminated rubrics and student checklists, re-teaching graphic organizers and other strategies would help students become proficient in narrative writing skills. The meeting concluded with the team selecting a different group of students to focus on the following week, and a new set of strategies. From the meeting, a discussion with teachers, and a review of teacher team notes from past meetings, it is unclear when teachers would implement next steps or decide their efficacy. While their work does not yet demonstrate an inquiry approach to strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers, the worktime does allow teachers to share elements of their practice and discuss planning alongside one another.

- **A review of kindergarten and first-grade on-demand writing data indicates progress in some areas of writing for some students.** Teachers are able to celebrate growth for some students across the unit from pre- to post-assessment. Though the work does not yet include set goals or consistent work with groups of students on whom they are focused, the scheduled meetings are providing a time for teachers to share their classroom practices and build community with colleagues. A review of the team’s notes and agendas from previous meetings evidence a similar focus on improving school culture and teacher practice.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices and scaffolds are beginning to reflect alignment to the belief that students learn best through the workshop model while incorporating independent and small group work.

Impact
Work products and discussions inconsistently reflect high levels of student thinking and participation, thus sometimes yielding meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- In a few classrooms teaching practices aligned with the school leader’s belief that students learn best through the use of the workshop model through a short explicit teaching point, modeling for students and independent and small group worktime for students. In a lower-grade reading lesson addressing decoding unknown words, the teachers set up stations for students with different decoding tasks, with an adult modeling for students before they engaged in independent practice. Students worked independently, had conversations with their peers, and demonstrated high levels of student thinking. In a fourth-grade math class, students were learning how to identify and plot points on a coordinate grid. The teacher modeled a strategy for students before beginning to work in pairs. Mid-way through the lesson, the class was brought together and the teacher had a student model another strategy providing students with an additional solution to use as they returned to partnered work. Teaching practices such as these, which align with shared beliefs about how students learn best, were not consistently evident in the classes visited.

- In other classes, the workshop model components were sometimes disconnected, as in a reading lesson where the teacher modeled a strategy for taking notes on the similarities and differences in two texts, but sent students off to answer questions about only one text, and thus students were unable to employ the strategy just taught. In a math lesson on comparing decimals, the teacher told students that the most useful strategy is to use the number line. The teacher then modeled how to find place value another way. Student groups then practiced four problems on their own. Several pairs of students were observed with wrong answers, and others unsure of which strategy to use. In another lesson, the learning objective was for students to explain how the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) affects the nervous system. The teacher showed students a video and student groups working in groups were to answer the multiple-choice questions. Many students were observed merely guessing, several groups worked together but arrived at wrong answers and other groups tried using the process of elimination. Supports to guide students in their thinking were not in evidence during the lesson. As a result, students demonstrated uneven levels of thinking.

- In a writing lesson, the stated learning objective was to have students generate ideas for their own feature articles. Students were provided a chart of text features and literary devices used by authors that was briefly reviewed by the teacher. Students reviewed an article about penguins and discussed the features of the text. When asked what the task was, some student groups indicated that they were to describe the article, while others thought they were to look for text features. As students were not sure about the task, limited learning was observed. In a reading lesson on author’s purpose, some students read an article about cowboys of the old west, and completed a worksheet requiring them to address pertinent questions specific to author’s purpose. Some students worked on answering these questions while the other half of the class worked on an online reading task, which was not connected to the learning objective. It was not clear if all students achieved the learning that was planned for this class period.
Findings

Pacing calendars and lesson plans are sometimes misaligned to the Common Core, and unevenly reflect planning to engage all students in rigorous tasks.

Impact

Curricula inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits limiting students from engaging in higher-order thinking experiences.

Supporting Evidence

- During the review, school staff shared pacing calendars, lesson plans and one unit as evidence of curricular planning. The pacing calendars and lesson plans that were shared demonstrate that school leaders and staff are in the process of aligning the curricula to the Common Core. A map of subjects with essential questions and topics for the year was reviewed. Topics for literacy included author’s purpose, inferencing and understanding. A review of a fourth-grade math power standards map, developed from a review of New York State (NYS) exam data from the previous academic year indicated topics of study such as interpreting information from graphs, and the main skills addressed in the Common Core. The school utilizes purchased curricular resources from city-approved vendors whose curricula align to the Common Core.

- A review of lesson plans indicates that at times there is misalignment to the standards. One lesson plan included a standard on writing an opinion. Students were to learn how to introduce a topic, state an opinion and supply reasons incorporating linking words. However, the mini lesson focused on pointing out different parts of a poem, such as stanzas, and patterns of sound. Although there were planned groups for students according to whether learners were exceeding, meeting or below level, the same reading text and questions were to be employed. Thus, multiple entry points for students were not in evidence. Additionally, it was unclear how rigorous habits or higher-order skills are planned and emphasized for students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). Another lesson plan did align to writing standards for a clear introduction of a topic and developing a topic with facts, details and quotations. However, the lesson’s activities addressed the identification and use of various text features such as captions, bold print, and subheadings.

- A review of other lesson plans revealed a limited connection to the standard or students were to engage in tasks that addressed the standard for the grade below. One plan for an upper-grade lesson connected to two fourth-grade speaking and listening standards that asked that students come to a discussion prepared, having read or studied required material, follow agreed upon rules, pose questions, comment on contributions, review key ideas, and report on information and findings with well-organized supporting ideas. In a meeting with students, several shared that their work at school is not usually challenging for students. Students shared that they often are learning things in math that they already learned. This misaligned planning with grade precise standards limits students’ opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills and access to the preparation necessary for next-level learning.
Findings

Teachers and school leaders are developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress. Across classes, teachers sometimes check for understanding during the lesson.

Impact

Students receive limited feedback regarding their achievement. Teachers inconsistently make adjustments to meet student-learning needs in the classroom.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers shared that the school uses common assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. The school’s assessment plan indicates formative and summative assessments in literacy and math for the purpose of identifying short- and long-term goals and intervention strategies. Notes from a math team demonstrate that school staff has identified power standards in math, which were determined by an analysis of the state assessment exam data linking the required fluencies and grade-level priorities. In meetings with teachers during the review, most shared that teachers use information from these exams to adjust instruction, usually through grouping and differentiated tasks for students. In lesson plans and other curricular documents however, it is unclear how teachers use the results of other common assessments to adjust instruction and planning.

- Across the school, teachers use leveled reading assessments to assess fluency, comprehension skills and determine students’ independent reading levels. While documents did not include planning connected to student independent reading levels, students shared that they know their reading levels. Students explained that knowing their reading levels helps them to select independent reading books that are right for them and to set goals so that they can improve. Thus, students are using one of the school’s common assessments to adjust curricular resources that they select.

- In most classes observed, teachers asked questions of students or circulated throughout the room to check for understanding. However, teachers seldom used these checks for understanding to make adjustments to meet student-learning needs. In one class, the teacher checked for student understanding through questioning, but only provided correct answers. In a reading lesson, a teacher checked over a student’s work, gave the student a level two score and told the student to keep practicing. When asked, the student explained that he needs to keep practicing, but was uncertain what to do differently to improve his practice. Students self-assessed during the lesson with the same rubric but few were able to explain how to improve their work.

- In one class, the teacher and a paraprofessional checked for understanding through conferring with individuals or pairs of students, and offered on-the-spot adjustments. The educators also asked students to explain their work to them, offering students an opportunity to self-assess. One student was able to notice his own mistake in arithmetic and use the conference with the teacher to correct his work. This effective use of checking for understanding to meet student-learning needs was not consistently observed across classes.
Findings
School leaders consistently communicate expectations to staff connected to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and use of the workshop model. Common structures for helping families understand expectations for students are not yet fully established.

Impact
Training and accountability measures do not yet align to the school leader’s shared expectations. Families do not always receive feedback about their children’s progress.

Supporting Evidence

- There are several ways that school leaders communicate high expectations to staff for instruction, professionalism and communication, including the use of a staff handbook, emails to staff, and a morning meeting with the school leaders and teachers. Teachers and staff shared that they clearly understood the school leaders’ expectations for use of the workshop model in instruction. Teachers who were interviewed shared that professional learning addressed their work with literacy and math and improving pedagogy in the school. Teachers and school leaders further explained they are working on creating a culture of trust within the school, and building respectful relationships between staff members. Professional learning records indicate that they are beginning to develop rigorous tasks in math, implement the new science curriculum and share resources with teachers for developing Individualized Education Programs and serving ELLs.

- The school leaders hold data meetings with teachers to hold teachers accountable for student achievement and instructional expectations. However, the focus of these meetings is not always consistent. Teachers explained that sometimes the school leader and teachers discuss math and writing progress with next steps and at other times the agenda is vague. Some, but not most, expectations connected to the Danielson Framework for Teaching are made clear through the observation and feedback process. These systems for training and accountability are still developing, resulting in limited support to teachers.

- School leaders and staff are in the process of developing systems to consistently provide feedback to families regarding student progress. Some teachers text with family members often to ensure that parents and caregivers understand expectations and offer help with homework. Others communicate specifically during designated family engagement time on Tuesday afternoons. One parent shared that their child wasn’t bringing home any homework and she made a sign in sheet and had the teacher write in the homework. During the meeting, parents expressed the need for better communication from the school. Report cards are distributed quarterly but families want ongoing progress reports to ensure their child is progressing and achieving their goals.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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</table>

Findings

School leaders support the development of teachers through observations, though feedback is not always specific, data-driven, and time bound. Although some feedback captures the teachers’ strengths, challenges, and next steps, it is not yet fully aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Feedback from observations does not always provide clarity regarding expectations or results in the support of teacher growth and reflection.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders engage in frequent observations of teacher practice connected to some but consistently to all components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Observation records and conversations with teachers gave evidence to feedback being provided to teachers. However, the feedback provided is not always consistent. Often teachers receive feedback addressing a component that was not rated. For one teacher, planning practices were not rated, yet the next step for the teacher was to use previous data to plan instructional strategies. Another report indicated feedback addressing questioning and discussion techniques with recommendations to assess and record student learning during the lesson. A careful review of the report revealed that the feedback offered was not timely in that it has asked the teacher to change their practice the following school year. The inconsistent and varied levels of feedback prevent teachers from improving their practice and hinder maximizing student learning.

- Feedback that is time bound and connected to student work or data is inconsistently in evidence. One report that rated student engagement in discussion and growing professionally included the following feedback: “Have students discuss the task as it relates to other concepts.” As the feedback does not clearly indicate which concepts or its implementation along with student data, it does not yet fully connect to the Danielson Framework for Teaching limiting the support for a teacher’s professional growth.

- Some of the teachers believe that the observation process is helpful for promoting their professional growth. One teacher shared that feedback from observations led to her use of the workshop model. Another teacher, however, shared that the feedback tends to be general or a practice they are already doing. Teachers explained that the feedback often requires resources that they do not have therefore, making implementation difficult. Teachers also indicated that sometimes reports are placed in their mailbox and the effectiveness of the process is diminished. Although the process is sometimes positively affecting some of the teachers, there is a need for continuing and strengthening the development of a more effective, consistent observation process to promote teacher support and improved pedagogy.