Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School
Elementary 05M318
276 West 151St Street
Manhattan
NY 10039

Principal: Dawn Brooks Decosta

Dates of Review:
April 10, 2019 - April 11, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Buffie Whitfield
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School


School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></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>
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<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>
</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>
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</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

### To what extent does the school...

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

## Systems for Improvement

### To what extent does the school...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<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>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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<tbody>
<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>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<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>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Focus</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<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>
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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>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

The school community’s approach to culture-building is centered on the whole child, building leadership, and personal responsibility for students. The school strategically aligns professional development for teachers, families, and students.

Impact

Students rise to the expectations of being leaders and, as such, participate in decisions that guide school improvement. Professional development (PD) efforts support the school community’s adoption of positive personal and academic behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- The school community’s governing philosophy for social-emotional growth of students is through their development of leadership skills and preparation for the 21st century, aligned with the Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School (TMALS) collective core beliefs of respect, self-awareness, perseverance, and accountability. The entire school staff is trained and using emotional intelligence skills associated with recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion (RULER), designed to ensure that students learn responsibility, and are accountable to becoming their personal best. Students shared that they use mood meters and class charter agreements to hold each other accountable, and how they handle conflicts. This approach is also used for staff and for families, so there is a common language and practice for the full school community. This approach has fostered calmer classrooms, safer spaces for students, and more focused instructional time. Teachers and students shared that the school’s culture fosters a safe and inclusive learning environment that engages students in the shared values of problem-solving, and teamwork. Parents shared that their children use mindfulness practices at school, and have incorporated mediation strategies at home. Each class has a student mediation leader who facilitates class conflict resolution. One parent shared, “My child has taught her sibling how to mediate.” Another parent shared that the principal plays jazz and classical music that helps expose students to the arts.

- PD is provided to the school community, which supports the positive environment. In the visited classes, students tracked academic and personal behaviors and used language such as, “I am being proactive when I prepare my materials for my conferencing with the teacher.” A workshop on the school’s new social-emotional program was provided for the parents to support a home-school connection. The principal focuses on offering activities that incorporate all family members. Each family agrees to volunteer within the school for 20 hours each per school year to support school improvement. For example, grandparents support teachers and students in the classrooms by reading aloud to students. Three grandparents shared, “I think that these intergenerational connections strengthen children’s foundation. This school is unique and many of my family members have attended. This culture has greatly benefited my family!”

- A guidance counselor, two administrative assistants, an assistant principal, and the principal provide a multi-pronged approach, which ensures that students receive personalized supports for their social-emotional needs, and supports good attendance. All students are known well by at least one adult across the school, and staff shared that they feel a sense of responsibility for all students in the school. For example, students shared that they feel the school is like a family because former teachers continue to support and track their progress, and this has impacted positively on their home life.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 5.1 Monitoring and Revising Systems | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

School leaders and staff have a process to monitor and regularly evaluate the school’s curricula, pedagogy, assessments, teacher teamwork, and PD experiences.

Impact

The school’s memorialized system for regularly evaluating schoolwide decisions does not purposefully lead to increased coherence of curricular and instructional policies and practices across all grades and departments. The quality of teacher teamwork and the effectiveness of PD are not strategically monitored in relation to what teachers need to learn to support student mastery of the Common Core Learning Standards for all subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and key faculty members periodically monitor and adjust practices in response to curricula, pedagogical, and assessment practices to ensure compliance based on the school’s action plans. Cabinet meeting agendas and minutes revealed that teachers are looking at the relationship between PD practices and their instructional effectiveness, and they continue to work on their processes to become more systematic and transparent. While most grade-level team leaders monitor student academic achievement, results from State tests, and year-to-date attendance, only some incremental adjustments are implemented during the school year. Most major decisions to change or adjust processes and practices are made during the summer, so there are missed opportunities to make purposeful decisions in response to students’ learning needs as they arise during the course of the school year.

- Cabinet meeting agendas reflect regular reviews of the effectiveness of the work of teacher-teams in alignment with the feedback teachers receive from observations. Most feedback to teachers and the work of teacher-teams are consistent to ensure the quality of focus-impact teams, which is leading to more students demonstrating mastery of focus standards for low, medium, and high performing students. The quality of the work of impact teacher-teams continues to demonstrate growth in effective teaching practices, but has not led to a strategic analysis of student work products to impact a larger number of students to help close the achievement gap.

- There is a system to routinely make curricular adjustments, such as revising performance tasks, supplementing curricula materials, and incorporating the use of new strategies to support student-learning needs. Additionally, school leaders review feedback that teachers provide to students to ensure that all students are cognizant of the feedback and that they are progressing as a result of the feedback. The school leaders share data with the instructional coach that enables the coach to support staff in making strategic decisions related to elements of the instructional core. However, a formalized system is not currently in place to ensure that all members of the school community are involved with the curricular monitoring and revision process. School leaders and teacher-teams review curricular maps to make adjustments. They also monitor student achievement data from standardized assessments and teacher created common assessments in relation to teachers’ practices. However, instructional practices across the vast majority of classrooms do not currently reveal coherence across all grades and subject areas on what is taught and how it is taught. The school community continues to improve alignment and coherence across subjects in the instructional core, so that affected student sub-populations can demonstrate increased mastery in relation to the Common Core.
Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous learning habits.

Impact

School leaders make purposeful decisions to build coherence, such as focusing on problem solving and reading across all grades. Higher-order thinking is consistently required in academic tasks, so that all learners must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- In an effort to build coherence across grades and subject areas, teachers review lessons together. Teachers also utilize planning templates to capture essential questions, skills, assessments, and culturally relevant projects. A reading unit addresses Common Core-aligned standards, such as producing clear and coherent writing appropriate to the task, drawing evidence from literary information to support analysis, reflection, research, and the use of academic vocabulary. A math curriculum document infuses instructional shifts, such as conceptual understanding, fluency, and application in real life scenarios. For example, second-grade focus standards include, “Understand that the three digits of a three-digit number represent amounts of hundreds, tens, and ones; counting within 1000, skip-count by fives, tens, and hundreds; and read and write numbers to 1000 using base-ten numerals and number names.” Similarly, for reading, curricular documents ask students to think about how characters change from the beginning of a story until the end.

- A review of curricular documents indicates that students are exposed to high levels of thinking. In a grade-four unit on Women of Color, through multiple texts, students examine how the past affects their future. Students are to describe the cultural background of the character, setting, problems women face, and their actions. A performance task for the unit requires a close reading of the text to gather text-based evidence to support and write an analysis of their accomplishments.

- In grade-two, students engage in early algebra skills by classifying numbers up to 20 as odd and even by using tens frames. In this unit, students learn to use symbols to represent unknown numbers in an equation. The science curriculum provides students with opportunities to understand how scientists solve problems. Students use inquiry skills in a grade-two science unit to compare and contrast two objects. In a grade-four science unit, students engage in a hands-on laboratory experiment where they predict, observe, and examine different substances to determine their ability to mix with water, and explore which objects will sink or float based on their composition and shape.
Findings

Across most classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the belief that students learn best when the whole child is educated by addressing their social-emotional as well as academic needs. Students engage in learning tasks that provide multiple opportunities for them to make their thinking visible during instruction.

Impact

Instruction across all grades consistently reflects the school’s core beliefs, so that students are routinely engaged in high levels of student thinking and participation to produce meaningful work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices reflect and support schoolwide core beliefs about how students learn best and are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the school’s curricula. For example, the school believes that students learn best when teachers make the learning targets clear and concise. The school also believes that students learn best when they have an opportunity to work both independently and in groups to manipulate the concepts being studied and have multiple opportunities to work towards mastery. Across most classrooms, instruction, outcomes, strategies, and learning activities are standards-based, such as by utilizing technology as a learning tool. Across the majority of classrooms, document readers and interactive whiteboards were used to support students in making their thinking visible.

- Most teachers provided students with time during lessons to think, collaborate, and discuss their ideas related to the lesson’s objective or learning intention. For example, in a math class, students measured the length of an object using non-standard units. Students took turns using cubes to measure the height of their peers. They predicted the length of the front of a square and shared their answers. Students worked cooperatively to make their thinking visible in this class and in other similar classes. There were many examples of active student engagement, participation, and thinking across most grades and subjects visited.

- Instructional practices, learning strategies, and outcomes are research-based and reflect the belief in educating the whole child. Across most classrooms, teachers integrate sensory tasks into lessons to support the development of students. Across classrooms, students were provided with opportunities to think independently and work in groups to create meaning. For example, in a literacy class, teachers conferred with selected students, while the other students worked with a partner to retell their story, discuss cite words, and describe pictures from their book. In a science class, students used jelly beans to design a glue mixture.
**Additional Finding**

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

Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies aligned with the school’s curricula. They use common assessments to track student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

**Impact**

Teachers provide students with actionable and effective standards-based feedback and track student progress to make instructional adjustments in English Language Arts and math.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers utilize various assessments, such as Fountas and Pinnell running records in grades kindergarten (K)-five, performance tasks, and teacher developed pre- and post- assessments. The resulting data are used to identify specific student academic levels. Moreover, end of unit writing assessments across grades are used to assess student progress in reaching their goals. Information from the assessments provides teachers with feedback regarding student mastery of the key standards and student achievement both individually and as a grade. Analysis of Common Core-aligned assessment results yields information about growth and gaps in student knowledge. The pre- and post-assessments inform students about their achievement and next steps for their learning and goals. The results from these assessments provide school leaders and teachers with item analysis data for each student. The analysis of this data is used to make instructional adjustments, such as purposeful grouping of students across the grades according to their reading and math levels. After an analysis of math results from across the grades, trends were identified by the staff of challenges faced by students in solving multi-step word problems. Grades K-two were expected to use the circle the key words, underline the question, box math action words, evaluate and eliminate, and show your work and check (CUBES) strategy, and grades three-five to use Polya’s method, a four-step approach using preparation, thinking time, insight, and verification, when solving math word problems.

- Teachers provide feedback to students through conversations during conferences about their work, and in written comments that align to elements of task-specific rubrics. Feedback is evident on student work displayed in classrooms and on hallway bulletin boards. Teachers provide the next steps and use rubrics to help students to identify the criteria for improving their work. Most student work showed rubric-based performance level scores with teacher comments. In a math class, students completed a task on place value. A student received a numeric grade on the assignment and was given the following meaningful feedback: “You are able to write a number in expanded form. You also did your exponents correctly. You did not show your work!”

- Teachers identify standards where students are not performing well, and then discuss and make instructional decisions to address these gaps by adapting the curricula, instruction, pacing calendar, and interventions. Teachers also assesses early reading skills through multiple data sources in conjunction with language proficiency test scores. The data from these multiple sources revealed the need to provide interventions to students who struggle with early reading skills, such as sound-symbol correspondence and word recognition. Teachers reported that during their grade-level meetings, they use baseline assessment data to make informed decisions about their instruction during guided reading lessons.
**Additional Finding**

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

**Findings**

The majority of teacher-teams meet in inquiry-based collaborations using a structured protocol to review student work, make suggestions, and promote student achievement. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

**Impact**

The school’s structured teacher-team collaborations strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers. Teachers have a voice in making decisions that affect student learning across the school, such as the development of a unified lesson planning template.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers have flexibility in planning lessons, working to examine student work, and sharing ideas on how to effectively teach students. Most teachers agreed that the principal has enabled them to contribute creative ideas on lesson planning and execution that have increased student engagement across grades and subjects. Most teachers use a lesson plan template that was collaboratively developed, offering students opportunities to explore during lessons. This enables students to go deeper and investigate the skill they are focused on and to demonstrate creativity. Teachers helped to decide on focus standards to be addressed in unit plans. Finally, teachers shared that they are able to meet across grades, with the support of school leaders, to build greater coherence of instructional practices.

- During a teacher-team meeting, teachers shared concrete examples of how they have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school. For example, teachers were instrumental in developing the essential components of the school’s lesson plan template. Furthermore, teachers also shared that school leaders provide them with the freedom and flexibility to deviate from their plans, if they can justify the change. Teachers also shared that they have been able to suggest student programs and trips.

- Teachers shared that during most meetings, they have time to create, revise, and modify curricula. They analyze multiple forms of data, including student observations, math and reading performance tasks, and writing samples. The grade-four team looked at grade-wide trends, including strengths and weaknesses of identified students on whom they were focused. Teachers noticed that most students were able to sequence key events, and respond to literal questions. However, students still struggled with inferential questions, understanding figurative language, central theme and message, and author’s point of view. Teachers updated curricular maps to incorporate additional inferential questions across subjects. This has strengthened their ability to better implement guided reading.