Quality Review Report

2018-2019

M.S. 137 America's School of Heroes
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 27Q137
109-15 98 Street
Queens
NY 11417

Principal: Laura Mastrogiavanni

Dates of Review:
December 18, 2018 - December 19, 2018

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

M.S. 137 America's School of Heroes 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><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# School Quality Ratings continued

## School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<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>
<td>Well Developed</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>
<td>Well Developed</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>
<td>Proficient</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>
<td>Well Developed</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>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings

The school community’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by the theory of action that if all teachers, student support specialists, and guidance counselors implement social-emotional learning and growth-mindset principles, then students' academic and behavioral outcomes will improve. Professional development (PD), family outreach, and student learning experiences and supports are strategically aligned.

Impact

Students benefit from a safe environment that is inclusive, respectful, and guided by student voice through venues such as the student government. Implementation of the BrainPower program protocols supports their adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Students have an active voice and role in leadership of the school’s culture, primarily through the student government. Each class elects a representative to serve as a liaison between school leaders, teachers, and students. Each grade level also elects a president, vice president, and secretary to represent their grade. This team plans schoolwide events and fundraisers. Student governance has empowered them to hold schoolwide fundraising events that promote awareness of autism and breast-cancer. Students decided that the breast-cancer walk should expand beyond the school perimeter and so the fundraising walk extended into the community. Student voice was also central to the design and facilitation of the school’s Career Day event. Additionally, after reading the novel *A Long Walk to Water*, students decided that they wanted to have a positive impact and launched an awareness-raising project in conjunction with a fundraiser. Students have created a video public service announcement, a brochure, and have written essays designed to build awareness and offer resources to those who would want to contribute funds to clean water.

- Students came to quick consensus that their voice is integral to the school culture. One stated, “We all wanted to see as many visitors on Career Day as possible, so now we have the assembly where we all get to see them all.” Additionally, students shared their appreciation of the school’s annual multi-cultural event that features the foods, clothing styles, and dances from the different cultures represented by the student body.

- Students’ academic behaviors are positively influenced through schoolwide implementation of a program that trains teachers how to embed physical and mental brain breaks, mindfulness practices, and social-emotional wellness strategies into classroom procedures. After lead teachers attended a retreat hosted by the program in June, PD was provided for the whole school in September. This was followed by additional PD in November. Additionally, teachers are visited by coaches throughout the year in order to guide them toward integrating the program’s practices into daily instruction. They also benefit from lead teachers who facilitate Monday PD meetings by modeling the practices as they would with a class of students. Multiple strategies, such as embedded brain-breaks and breathing exercises, were observed during class visits. Students reported that these activities have helped them remove anxiety around academic work and have made instruction more fun. One student stated and all present agreed, “It’s really great that they want us to learn and to do it without too much stress. It’s kind of fun too.”
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the articulated belief that students learn best when they are engaged in collaborative work and student-to-student discussions. Students participate in discussions that involve high-level thinking.

Impact

Students’ cooperative work within small student groups and high levels of student thinking and participation are evident across classrooms, but not within the vast majority.

Supporting Evidence

- During a grade-eight math class, students worked in cooperative groups to write equations from word problems. Students in a grade-seven English Language Arts (ELA) class analyzed the novel *Long Walk to Water* in cooperative groups that had a group leader at three stations centered around either reading, writing, or discussion. Grade-six students worked cooperatively in a math class to formulate algebraic equations that equaled 36, using each of the four different operations. Grade-eight students worked in groups during a social studies class to determine the punishment that the Triangle Shirtwaist factory owners should have received. Although students were in groups across classrooms, there were also examples of classes in which students sat in groups but were not asked to work cooperatively. For example, students in a grade-seven art class were directed first to write the instructional objective and learning target into their notebooks and were then twice asked to read them aloud. Additionally, while students sat in groups in a grade-six science class and observed the teacher’s experiment that demonstrated how a metal object was affected by heat, students were not asked to interact within their groups as they answered questions about the experiment.

- During a grade-seven ELA class, table leaders facilitated student-to-student discussions about a text utilizing schoolwide discussion questions. In a grade-six math class, after students developed their equations, they used a protocol to determine which group was to share the equations they designed and answer follow-up question from other groups. After watching a video presentation about chemical reactions during a grade-six science class, students talked with partners about why thermal energy is a result of chemical reactions. Grade-eight ELA students conducted a Socratic seminar during which they examined whether the main character in “Harrison Bergeron,” by Kurt Vonnegut, was helping society through his defiance of its rules. Additionally, students discussed the differences between people having equal opportunities to succeed and the forced equality under which people lived in the short story.

- Within some observed classes, there were missed opportunities to maximize students’ participation in discussions. For example, in a grade-eight math class, the teacher asked students to predict the answer to an equation and accepted answers from individual students, without having students discuss that question amongst themselves. After grade-six students drew representations of molecules in different temperature stages on the board, the teacher directed discussion of the posted work so that all answers were offered to the teacher without any student-to-student engagement. Later during that same class, students were instructed to turn and talk with each other about the chemical formula for water, with a majority of conversations ending long before the two-minute allotment. Additionally, during a grade-eight math lesson, student groups worked on word problems as groups. However, the structure within which they worked allowed some students to dominate and some to be more passive and therefore contribute less than others.
Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

Coherent curricula across grades and subjects evidence strategic integration of the instructional shifts related to the citation of text-based evidence as well as building students' math fluency. Emphasis on rigorous habits and higher-order skills requires that all students demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- All curricular materials are aligned to the Common Core and show evidence of strategic integration of the instructional shifts. Integration of the shift in ELA that supports students' ability to defend their arguments with textual evidence can be seen across a vast majority of lesson plans. In a grade-six ELA lesson plan, students are tasked with finding the evidence that would support thematic statements related to the assigned novel, *Among the Hidden*. A grade-six English as a New Language (ENL) lesson plan requires students to analyze the social context in which Martin Luther King Jr. and Jackie Robinson worked, and support their arguments with textual evidence from either primary source photos, video presentations, or documents. In a grade-eight social studies lesson plan, students are to predict the needs for additional colonies based on geography as well as population growth. Additionally, there is a focus on academic vocabulary in the curricular documents for ELA, social studies, science, and math.

- In a grade-six math lesson plan, students are required to explain the process they use when they develop an algebraic equation that would equal 36. In a grade-six dual language math lesson plan, students are to write algebraic expressions that model real-world situations involving budgeting money while eating out at a restaurant. Additionally, students are to represent the different amounts they plan to spend using various currency and coinage combinations. In a grade-eight Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) algebra lesson plan, students are to sort through tables, graphs, equations, and types of solutions to find those that go together. They are then to justify how they decided on those matches.

- Lesson plans include activities requiring higher-order thinking across grades and subjects, so that all learners, including students with disabilities, demonstrate their thinking. For example, a grade-eight ICT social studies lesson plan includes an activity during which students will decide which punishments should have been issued to the Triangle Shirtwaist Company owners, given their responsibility for the tragic fire of 1911, and discuss the thought processes that resulted in their decisions. In another grade-eight social studies lesson plan, students are to review the various freedoms in the United States and predict how religious freedoms would be significant to both Europeans and American colonists, and identify the connections between both peoples and the reasons why students connected them. Additionally, a grade-six dual language math lesson plan requires that students discuss each step they take to arrive at algebraic expressions and a grade-six ICT science lesson plan would have students identify what would happen to a metal when exposed to different amounts of heat and think aloud the ways that metal objects would change from one temperature to the next.
Additional Finding

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. In addition, teachers’ practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

High quality assessment practices provide actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers’ assessment practices result in effective adjustments during classroom instruction and in modifications to subsequent lessons that meet all students’ needs and enable them to be aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the school, examples of teachers’ feedback to students evidence clear portraits of student mastery and feedback to students that they can use for increased achievement. For example, feedback offered to students on a grade-six science assignment asked them to more completely describe the insulators and conductors, add labeled illustrations, and underline key terms. Feedback on math assignments highlights the value of determining how a graph changes when the y-intercept is changed, to show all work, and to answer problems from a variety of perspectives. Additional examples of feedback directed students to add additional evidence, analyze the evidence they are using in support of their arguments, proofread to check for proper grammar and use of punctuation, use context clues to determine the meaning of words, and develop characters by not only focusing on character traits but also their connection to setting. Use of rubrics by teachers and students is also evident across the school.

- Students came to a quick consensus when reporting on the value of their teachers’ written feedback and their use of that feedback to improve their learning. One student reported that he is still using the strategies his teacher taught him on how to organize an argumentative essay. Another student added that she was not consistently citing evidence to support her claims until her teacher worked with her on maximizing her use of the restate the question, answer the question, cite evidence, and explain how that evidence supports the answer (RACE) protocol. Other students discussed how teacher feedback has pushed them to consistently show their work in math, describe the steps taken during science experiments, and use their notations to support their narratives of the experiments’ results.

- Across most classrooms, there was evidence that teachers are assessing students’ learning and making adjustments to instruction, as necessary. During a grade-eight math lesson, the teacher redirected the class in order to pose the question “I am wondering why we are supposed to use substitution and not elimination” after noticing a common struggle among students after circulating throughout the room. Later in the same lesson, the teacher informed students that she had also noted a common error that students were making with distribution and then retaught that concept. A grade-ten math teacher noticed that of the four functions students were to use to formulate equations that would equal 36, all groups but one struggled and so the teacher retaught the concept and then had a representative from the group that had correctly developed a multiplication problem that equaled 36 present their answer. Additionally, teachers checked in with students and students self- and peer-assessed in all visited classes throughout the school visit.
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’ and school leaders’ support of each other in ensuring that everyone can meet the high expectations to which all are held. 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 in the documents that memorialize these expectations. For example, classroom instruction expectations, pedagogical strategies aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching, inquiry-work expectations, the value of celebrating student work, instructional design, and day-to-day school operations are all shared and discussed. The document entitled Instructional Moves identifies a variety of discussion and collaborative strategies, describes them, and guides teachers toward methods for embedding them into daily classroom instruction, many of which were observed in classrooms during the school visit.

- The school community’s culture of mutual accountability is not only evident in their reliance on colleagues to arrive to team meetings prepared so that all parties can participate and rely on each other for group growth, but also through the Pineapple Board structure that involves teachers identifying an area of pedagogical mastery or inquiry and the time of day they are available to be visited. Teachers also spoke about a mutual accountability to high expectations with school leaders. They rely on the principal to support them and respond to their requests. For example, teachers discussed that when they asked for improved technology, the principal responded by providing all teachers with new classroom-based technology. Additionally, teachers are involved in a budget analysis procedure to ensure that both leaders and teachers are equally accountable for purchasing decisions based on usage and impact trends.

- Through the use of tools such as an internet gradebook platform, social media, and workshops, school leaders and teachers communicate with parents and have partnered with them to support their children’s success. Parents spoke about how using the online gradebook has empowered them to support their children at home. One parent spoke about how she was able to keep her daughter up-to-date on assignments by using the online gradebook. Parents also discussed their increased ability to help their children with specific topics of math by using the resources that teachers have made available through the online gradebook and in the hands-on tutoring offered by school leaders during a math workshop for parents. One parent stated, and all present agreed, “I’m now able to talk about math using the same academic language as the teachers and help my child because of all [that the school leaders and teachers do] to help us.

- Parents partner with school leaders and teachers in organizing the school’s Career Day event. Parents served as presenters and recruited additional presenters by canvassing family and community members. Representatives from a wide variety of careers, including television-news program broadcasters, lawyers, military personnel, and a professional boxer all visited the school during the most recent Career Day. After in-class presentations took place, the entire school community gathered in the auditorium so that all students could benefit from a panel discussion, ensuring that all students were exposed to as many careers as possible.
### Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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</table>

**Findings**

All teachers are engaged in teams that consistently analyze student work in cycles of inquiry that reveal targeted areas of student need and actively address them in their work toward fulfilling the school's goals. Distributive leadership structures are in place that enable teachers to have a role in decision making.

**Impact**

Collaborations within grade teams and the vertical inquiry team strengthen teachers’ instructional capacity and schoolwide instructional coherence while data reveals an increase in student achievement. Teacher voice is central to decisions, such as the introduction of social-emotional wellness programs, the nature of PD sessions, and increasing students’ access to library services.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The grade-eight ELA teacher team met to discuss students’ performance on the end-of-unit one assessments. Teachers found that when asked to identify a theme, students often mistakenly named a topic. Two teachers then reviewed a strategy they were developing that would ask students to first identify the main topics of a work of literature and then guide students toward transforming that into a thematic statement. The unit-two performance task was then analyzed so that teachers could determine whether the instructions were student-friendly and could be coherently shared across all grades. Agendas and notes show similar work conducted by teacher teams with different targeted student groups. The grade-seven social studies team is focused on addressing students’ struggles with writing about historical concepts and facts as clearly as they are able to articulate them during classroom discussions. The grade-six science teacher team is exploring ways to help students who are able to memorize the definitions of science-specific academic vocabulary, but are unable to effectively use those same words in their short, written responses. Four different strategies were being implemented, the results of which would be assessed in January in order to evaluate their success and viability.

- Increases in students’ ELA and math State exam results evidence the impact of the various teams’ inquiry work. Students earning a Level 3 or 4 on the State ELA exam increased five percentage points and on the State math exam by three percentage points. Additionally, students in all subgroups showed gains in those same State exams.

- One teacher shared, “This year I am working with a model teacher. She has been coming in with my ELL class… I am being pushed to step outside of my comfort zone. I do not naturally want to do a gallery walk… I presented a lesson to her and now I am doing station activities on my own.”

- In addition to the teachers who serve as teacher team members, all teachers voiced a common value that teacher team membership was vital to students’ success and so all teachers voted that all teachers should participate in teacher team meetings. Teachers also participate in the instructional cabinet, which makes decisions that impact the school’s curriculum. Teachers and guidance counselors were also central in the decision to adopt the Widiko and Brainpower programs after attending a retreat during the summer of 2018. Other examples of the impact that teacher voice has had on school decisions were in opening the library earlier for early-arriving students, becoming a host-site for the New York State Music Association (NYSMA) competition, and in choosing the topics of PL cycles through a teacher survey.