Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Marsh Avenue School for Expeditionary Learning
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 31R063
100 Essex Drive
Staten Island
NY 10314

Principal: Cara De Angelo

Dates of Review:
May 23, 2019 - May 24, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Sonja Webber-Bey
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

Marsh Avenue School for Expeditionary Learning 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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</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>
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</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>
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## 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>Area of Focus</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings
The school’s culture is guided by its association with Expeditionary Learning (EL) education and its Outward Bound initiatives, such as participation in Better World Day and outdoor experiences, focusing on social-emotional support, racial equity awareness, and skill development.

Impact
School leaders and faculty contribute to a safe and inclusive environment in which students initiate and lead improvement efforts that heighten student engagement and college readiness. Social-emotional supports positively affect students’ academic and personal behaviors, and students are well known.

Supporting Evidence

- School culture is embedded in an EL theory of action, “get smart to do good”, which values students’ unique character. All students begin their enrollment with an overnight Outward Bound camping experience, leading to participation in Crew advisory groupings overseen by the same staff members through to the day of graduation, building relationships, trust, and developing emerging young adult personalities. Staff norms interactions, starting student inquiries with, “Are you helping the community, or causing chaos in the community?” One student remarked, “As a lottery school, students are randomly picked. The curriculum stays the same, but more perspectives are given.” Another student added, “All kids who come here share where they live and how they live; there are differences, yet we all get along. Students here learn to help each other out.”

- EL work-plan goals, such as ‘how to support development of work products having a real-world purpose and an authentic audience’, direct staff development in habits of success, culturally responsive education, and advancing equity. Recognized in 2019 as a Respect for All school, students took part in Better World Day through multiple civic actions, like creating public service announcements about childhood hunger, and continue to participate in Beyond Differences, an organization that inspires students nationwide to end social isolation. One member shared, “In my old school, we really didn’t talk much. Now, I collaborate more, it brings more out of me.”

- A representative student group, called The Organization, brings student voice to school leaders, often as the result of student surveys. For instance, students wanted more ice cream offered during lunch. The Organization alerted their advisor, suggesting profits could fund trips or buy new Coach books. Supportive school leaders shared this with the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) who sells the ice cream, resulting in an increased frequency of ice cream sales. Members also lead presentations during Crew meetings, once facilitating a listing of students who like their voices heard, and those who like to listen, which informed students and teachers alike toward encouraging emerging leaders. The Organization and Crew representatives attend cabinet meetings, especially the end-of-year meeting. Student opinions are welcomed thus, supporting a safe, inclusive culture in which student voice is meaningfully included in school improvement efforts.

- Each senior student generates a Passages project, inclusive of formal attire, reflection, props, a selected academic piece and goals, presented to a panel of staff and parents who can ask questions, and which is graded. One Passages presentation viewed can be summarized in the student’s voice, “Over the past three years, I have changed the principles in which I choose to live by…into integrity, self-worth and so much more…” This fabrication is supported by staff members across grades, subjects and social-emotional structures, has a positive impact on students’ reflection of academic and personal behavior growth.
Findings

School leaders support the development of teachers through frequent cycles of observations with effective feedback that includes next steps. School leaders have an effective system to drive the design and facilitation of professional learning and to inform staffing decisions.

Impact

Feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practice, supports teacher development, especially in culturally relevant social-emotional awareness practices, and promotes professional reflection; however, a strategic management system of observation cycles and professional learning is not yet evident.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal and an assistant principal partner together during the first round of observations to norm their expectations and noticings. A special education teacher remarked about feedback, “It starts with the little things. For me, it was about the placement of my anchor charts, and to print my lesson presentation slides for students, so they wouldn’t spend time copying. Later, feedback was about how to reach my students that struggle”. A music teacher received feedback on how to relinquish control over students by being quiet, “I have; now the students are doing more and offering their questions.” These kinds of next steps are representative of strategies that promote individual professional growth, yet were not inherent to a strategic plan to elevate schoolwide instructional practices.

- During a mid-year huddle meeting, school leaders used a planning note catcher to facilitate, organize and memorialize their discussion, which led to decisions to “tune or adapt” professional development (PD) planning. The document reveals a multitude of in-school, out-of-school, and partnership, as well as national forums attended by staff, for insight into topics such as, culturally responsive education, Urban Advantage science, Computer Science for All and EL. It is noted which staff member, members, or which group of staff participated in the training and is recorded, as well as which type of school goal is addressed by the training, a Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) goal, an EL work-plan goal, a PD priority connection, what Quality Review (QR) indicator is associated, or what element of the Framework for Great Schools would be enhanced. However, the analysis verification of individual teacher performance and schoolwide observation data to identify specific trends and actionable goals to elevate schoolwide instructional practices was not among the evidence submitted thus, it is not clear if the management of this system is strategic and transparent.

- Over twenty percent of students have Individualized Education Program (IEPs). When IEP goals’ progress report samples were reviewed, they indicated many trials for establishing mastery level of mandated criteria were not conducted with fidelity to the noted timeframes. Evidence of developing teachers’ design of coherent instruction integrated with appropriate student assessment was limited in the school’s PD plan. Samples represented a student subgroup in which “little progress” has been made, and to which school leaders commented they did not expect to meet the CEP goal of a three percent performance increase set for the group. In a January weekly reminder to teachers, school leaders noted the beginning of the third round of observations, “Keep in mind that we will be observing in your content area classes or your crew classes looking for evidence from our Character Work Plan Goals.” This addresses social-emotional development of students; however, does not address the instructional needs of an identified student subgroup achievement gap and thus, does not yet show strategic use of observation cycles to promote professional growth in this area.
## Findings

Coherently embedded rigorous habits and higher-order skills, such as persevere, explain and evaluate, are evident in curricula and tasks across grades and subjects, which are planned and refined as teachers examine student work and data.

## Impact

The curricula and tasks are accessible to a variety of learners, keeping students cognitively engaged while demonstrating their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- Crew lessons are an integral part of the school’s curricula and shape work that students are doing with habits of success, such as perseverance, reflection, and commitment to quality. In a lesson plan for a seventh-grade group, the learning target is stated in an “I can” format, requiring students to reflect on their recent student-led conferences, and participate in discussion prompted by “Why does reflecting require courage?” Groupings would then discuss and infer how the student-led conference experience would connect to the eighth-grade Passages project that would engage them next year, resulting in all learners demonstrating their thinking through the completion of a letter to their future selves to be opened mid-year in grade eight.

- A seventh-grade United States history course indicates each daily learning target, described by “I can” statements that include higher-order thinking skills, such as examine, explain, and evaluate. One lesson plan outlined a designed a chalk-talk protocol wherein students visit three of eight document areas to gather text evidence about the effects of slavery in America. Closing turn-and-talk discussions would be informally observed by the teacher for evidence of student analysis of documents and inferencing appropriateness. In an eighth-grade Algebra class, the lesson plan focuses on scatter plots, and identifies a learning target, “I can create and analyze a linear regression equation”. In partnerships, students would use graphing calculators to discern plot points based on movie ticket data charts, and then compare and analyze results to predict results for a current movie showcase. Also included, is to pull a group of students, based on assessment from two previous lessons, for a quick check-in on the required step-by-step routine for using the calculators appropriately, as well as an extension activity that would require some students to compare linear regression equations to exponential regression equations in a written explanation. These types of academic tasks were common across documents reviewed thus, ensuring all learners have access to curricula and are appropriately cognitively engaged.

- A sixth-grade science unit of study for a self-contained class includes teacher notes on the data sources considered for creating small groups, such as conference notes, teacher informal observations and recent testing data. The plan identifies two mixed-ability groups and rationale for selecting students, a chart identifying each student with disabilities, their strengths, associated IEP goal, current data, and planned academic, as well as management supports, such as guided notes, sentence starters, access to additional video clips, group size four or less, and refocusing prompts, that would be provided. In a sixth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plan, teachers added a chart that identified all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, along with notes on academic mastery status with inferencing, and noticings about students’ habits of success such as thoughtfulness. Seven planned groups included three that would receive a brain starter activity prior to joining a gallery walk, a group that included ELLs would have a vocabulary check in, and the printed guiding questions were varied by tier levels for each group These curricular documents are representative of those reviewed, further indicating curricula in all subjects is made accessible to a variety of learners.
**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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**Findings**

Teaching practices align to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs that is informed by EL and the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and students experience new understandings from connections between concepts or events using protocols such as ‘ask, imagine, plan’.

**Impact**

Using varying EL criteria, school leaders and teachers present instruction and tasks wherein students take ownership of their learning as they formulate questions, initiate topics, and make unsolicited contributions, and ensure all voices are heard in the discussions.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teaching practices reflect the school’s beliefs that both academic and personal behaviors of students should be nurtured to grow steadily. For example, in an eighth-grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) ELA class, groups of students discussed persuasive essays in the process of revision, and that would become a source for a collaborative video project called “Two Minutes of Change” based on interest topics such as animal issues, social acceptance, drug usage, mental or physical health, environmental matters, safety, or phone usage concerns. The teacher introduced a protocol for student review of peer writing and raised a question, “What will make our feedback productive?” A student responded, “Keep it specific.” Another student, referring to a rubric on his desk, added, “Use transitions to make thoughts more fluid.” A third student spoke in agreement, “Yes, so a reader can follow your ideas or information.” The second teacher in the classroom referred students to an anchor chart, Costa’s Level of Questioning, asking how it might help them form questions for their classmates. One student described the categories of the wording printed on the chart, and gave an example of a question that could be asked; “What judgment could be made of people who say they can’t leave their house without their phone?” Students then returned to their discussions and exchange of feedback.

- In another classroom, seventh-grade ICT students participated in designing model space exploration vehicles by employing the ask, imagine, plan protocol. Assorted materials for their model could be selected by each planning team. As one team member sketched a proposed design, students questioned others’ suggestions, based on a criteria and constraints checklist that had been distributed. One student asked, “How can we get the arm to unfold and still have it fit into the oatmeal canister?” Another inquired, “What would be the function of the paper fastener if we put it between the two towers?” The interchange of questions between students during discussion aligns with Danielson Framework for Teaching techniques, supports integration of the instructional shifts, such as, use of academic vocabulary and developing a deep understanding of content, which results in all students producing meaningful work products.

- Teachers agreed to incorporate EL Habits of Success criteria into their instructional tenets thus, students seek mastery as a reflective learner, to persevere, to make no excuses, and to commit to quality, alongside academic success criteria. During an eighth-grade Algebra class, while creating multiple equations from a long list of data sets, one student exclaimed, “It’s like a workout!” This was noted by the teacher as evidence of perseverance: ‘I accept new challenges and persist through obstacles.’ In a sixth-grade ELA class, groups completed a gallery walk with a note-catcher and protocol for examining photographs and making inferences about ‘its story’. Groups reported about their task dynamics, sharing comments like, “Each member spoke.”; “We needed more time.”; “The inferencing can help us reach our learning target.” These are examples of reflective learners, which is also evidence of high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership of learning.
Findings
The vast majority of teachers create success criteria, use subject-specific mastery rubrics and a customized grading policy aligned to the school curricula. Teacher practice reflects consistent and varied strategies for checking student understanding, including students’ own self-assessment.

Impact
Teachers provide actionable, meaningful feedback for learning outcomes, and make effective instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all learners, who are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- The grading policy is shaped on learning progressions of knowledge and skills, defined as not yet mastered, approaching mastery, and mastery with excellence. There is a range of mastery for each standard across grades and subjects. Levels are assessed three times for each unit, as a pre-assessment, a mid-unit check point of progress, and a final end-of-unit performance assessment. A student interviewed noted, “In the beginning of a unit, each student writes out smart goals. Units might last a few weeks. Some classes go through material quicker. There are check-ins that require evidence and reflection.” Another student recalled, “We took a survey with questions, added the score, and then read the learning style descriptions, such as visual learner, tactile learner. We know it can change over time, so we try other interest areas.” Collected data goes into a schoolwide tracking system, JumpRope, visible to staff and students thus, providing a clear portrait of student mastery, resulting in actionable and meaningful feedback regarding their achievement.

- Rubrics are designed across subject areas, identifying mastery levels, and are used throughout instructional units to identify accomplishments with consistent consideration of ELLs and students with disabilities, as well as next steps as appropriate for improvement. One student stated, “We review key words on the rubric and ask questions as an analysis of what’s expected.” Another student added, “Teachers show us models to set expectations.” One more student added, “So we can commit to quality.” Students are consistently offered choice within the task activities. A student shared, “There are different levels of tasks. The teacher will guide you, by asking questions to your choice. It’s connected to the levels of mastery, and tasks are customized to our learning styles.” A sixth-grade social studies rubric reviewed, in which students had to generate an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, had three areas of mastery described: the history of the conflict, inclusion of multiple perspectives, and commitment to quality. Both teachers and students use the rubrics to reflect on task outcomes.

- Teachers consistently use a variety of ongoing checks for understanding, including, but not limited to, thumbs up and down, conferencing, mid-lesson pauses to summarize or refocus learning, and exit cards. A grade-eight ELA teacher, paused group discussions about a video project proposal to ask progress status, then gave one group a graphic organizer, and a different group reference to an anchor chart depicting Costa’s level of Questioning. In another ELA teacher’s notes, next to student names, she entered handwritten phrases, such as, low-inference observation, thoughtful analysis of untold stories, and needs support with inferencing thus, enabling her to make effective adjustments to meet learning needs, such as providing a model writing sample and repetition of instructions. Students have self-reflection elements designed into their learning, recorded in assessment notebooks, to show awareness of Habits of Success, their involvement in student-led conferences, and then is magnified in their final Passages project. A parent remarked, “Passages presentations are not automatic grades, some students have had to go back, reflect more and add on.” This ensures students are aware of their next learning steps.
Findings

School leaders and teachers have built a culture of professional collaboration, including team-initiated intervisitations or lesson study, which fosters regular analysis of assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused.

Impact

Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core including the instructional shifts, resulting in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers engage in structured inquiry in a variety of structures: departmental, inter-departmental full faculty, inter-departmental grade team, co-teachers, co-teachers and paraprofessionals, social/psychological, crew grade teams, occupational, guidance, and speech pathologist, and library/media specialists; most teams convening weekly. Meeting times were restructured this year, during the afternoons when students have been dismissed, so longer timeframes lead to deeper discussions focused on strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers resulting in improved student learning. One teacher commented, “There is no failing here, students are moving toward mastery. It’s okay to be wrong, but a student needs to be open to making progress.”

- Each year, a Mastery Collaborative meets prior to the opening of school, the most recent focus being on student ownership of learning, designing choice, and creating authentic tasks that connect to the students’ lives. Follow up to this was a staff-wide inquiry session into understanding authenticity and how to identify its elements in tasks. Then the topic was taken to grade teams, where a consultancy protocol was utilized to review and provide constructive feedback to colleagues on task samples reviewed, and also engaged the department teams, in that their members invoked a revised version of the tuning protocol to ‘tune’ unit plan products for authenticity and complexity. A review of school documents and the team summary sheet, shows multiple teacher teams are examining focus areas targeting the achievement of schoolwide goals, one of which is to raise the performance level of the lowest third of their students, including general education and students with disabilities. For example, the social studies department is looking into inferencing around cause and effect in history; the science department’s focus is on using claim, evidence, and reasoning, writing, thinking structures in science; the math team is investigating the impact of problem-solving protocols on student outcomes.

- The special education team consistently analyzes performance and assessment data for students with disabilities, which they provide to all teachers. Working with an outside resource, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), teachers broadened their vision about options for differentiation that can booster progress for groups of students on whom they are focused. They collaborated with school leaders and teacher peers on appropriate ways to streamline and include scaffolds to the student trackers, made them more visually appealing and streamlined for student ease of response thus, supporting student reflection for all learners as they develop habits for success. School leaders report that academic progress slowed mid-year, and are optimistic that these practices will have an impact on long-range achievement.