Quality Review Report

2018-2019

P.S. 008 Isaac Varian
Elementary 10X008
3010 Briggs Avenue
Bronx
NY 10458

Principal: Claudia Tahiraj-Sadrija

Dates of Review:
December 12, 2018 - December 13, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Phyllis Siwiec
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

P.S. 008 Isaac Varian 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

<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>
<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>Proficient</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>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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
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#### Systems for Improvement

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the schools 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>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</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, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by a theory of action, while structures that support students are in place.

Impact
Personalized guidance services and advisory support the personal and academic growth of all students and adults. Student voice meaningfully contributes to decision-making that impacts schoolwide improvements.

Supporting Evidence

- The theory of action shared by the school leaders and staff involves cross-curricular learning that is project-based, uses collaborative groups, incorporates discussion about themes and social-emotional learning (SEL), and develops character education. Teachers address SEL needs and goals through improved curriculum, instruction, and assessment, so that students can integrate academic and SEL needs. During a discussion about safety and inclusion, students shared their ideas and insights. They concluded that it is essential to take a chance and shared that adults ask students, “What do you think?” One student stated, “What makes us have those brilliant ideas? Teachers let you express how you feel and hear from other students.” Further, ideas trigger more ideas that add on. In some classes, every Monday morning, class circles are formed to make decisions. Within these circles, students can share feelings without criticism in safe places. Another student added, “Our whole class loves it. We can come out of the dark. I feel so much lighter.”

- Guidance and other support systems that address the needs of all students are evident throughout the school. The school uses the positivity, respect, integrity, determination and empathy (PRIDE) initiative in conjunction with their Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Growth Mindset programs. There are monthly focused lessons that deal with specific behavioral guidelines such as hallway expectations, with the overview of “Today we are going to talk about how we are respectful, responsible, and safe in the hallway.” There are lessons for all grade levels and all shared spaces within the building. In addition, there are PRIDE class passports, where adults can write positive comments about students when they walk through hallways or other school areas, or have lunch in the cafeteria. Passport comments are then transferred to points that earn rewards for the class.

- An SEL survey is administered to students annually that asks students to reflect and respond to questions about the frequency of teachers talking to students about goal-setting, speaking up when needing help, what to do to improve work, and what talents a student has. The questions address how to learn in collaborative groups, reflect on feelings that limit or support engagement, and adult support. One question asked students to think back and pick how frequently they talked to an adult about their behavior or emotions. In addition, students were asked how many adults notice when they are sad or unhappy. Seventy-seven percent of 296 students who completed this question selected the range of one to ten adults as a response. Student voice is sought out and students have opportunities to plan and contribute to school improvement. For example, the student council collaborated with St. Patrick’s nursing home to address services for the elderly that are most needed. Students in grades three, four, and five participated in a Saturday program where they met to execute plans to help make the school building greener and to collaborate for more sustainability.
Findings
Teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices reflect checking for understanding, but do not currently include the varied use of student self-assessment activities.

Impact
While teachers use data to adjust instruction within departments and for individual classes, this practice does not currently lead to increased mastery for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence
- School leaders and teachers utilize common assessments aligned with the school’s curricula, such as iReady diagnostics in reading and math, pre- and post-unit writing assessments, formal and informal running records in English Language Arts (ELA), and math item/skills analysis. Teachers stated that these assessments provide information on students’ strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to develop action plans. Rubrics are used to assess the pre- and post-unit writing tasks. Two different colored markers are used to denote what criteria the writing pieces exhibit before the writing unit begins and as a summative score afterwards. Teachers noted that using two colors clearly delineates the improvement of the students’ skills, which clearly illustrates individual student growth.

- Shared assessment practices include the use of diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative assessments to help monitor student progress, evaluate the impact of instruction, assign/re-assign support staff, and inform strategic instructional adjustments. Although teachers and teams use common assessments to determine student progress across grades and subject areas and adjust curricular and instructional decisions, there was limited evidence that all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery.

- Teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of checks for understanding, as teachers walk around and check-in with students so that effective adjustments that meet their learning needs can be made. Some teachers also use clipboards to write observations and information about students as they walk around their classes and check-in with students. Teachers report that they use flexible groupings based on exit slips or check-ins. These include grouping students by designating an R for needing additional reteaching or more strategic instruction; Y for needing only some support that is not a complete reteach, and G for a “super good job”, as stated by students. During the observed lessons, there were several checks for understanding demonstrated, as in holding up one to five fingers to indicate levels of understanding of the reading theme. Afterwards, the teacher met with those who rated themselves with ones and twos and retaught the basic understandings of their theme. However, most submitted lesson plans had no provision for self-assessment beyond the use of a checklist and exit ticket. Students reported that the exit ticket and self-assessments did not always lead to knowing what to do next in building deeper understandings or practice.
Findings
Curricular units of study and lesson plans are coherent and aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, with instructional shifts focused on balancing informational text with fiction and using evidence with accountable talk in student discussions. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
Curricula promote college and career readiness for all students. Faculty members adjust materials through the use of guides that make texts and lesson objectives more accessible to the school’s diverse learners so that all students are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff have chosen programs that use curricular materials that are aligned to the Common Core such as Teachers’ College Readers and Writers Program in ELA, Envision Math, Amplify Science, and Passport for social studies. Students and teachers shared that they understand that the practiced skills are building a foundation for college and career readiness. Parents shared that they learned how to work with their children through information obtained by attending workshops offered by school leaders, teachers, and the Parent Association, such as the kindergarten and grade-one staff presentations on math programming and at-home supports for parents and their children.

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence consistent alignment with the Common Core and integration with the instructional shifts. In order to build coherence across schoolwide curricula with instructional shifts, teachers in grade level teams reviewed each instructional shift in ELA and math and delineated specific evidence found in each grade. For example, in analyzing shift-one across all grades in ELA, ensuring that there is a balance of informational and literary texts. In grade-three, students check-out two informational and two fictional texts from the school library. While in grade-four, book baggies contain a mix of fiction and non-fiction, along with balanced writing units of study that emphasize fiction and non-fiction writing genres. In addition, in grade-five, independent reading choices are balanced along with classroom libraries that have a range of options. Evidence of coherence across the math curricula in shift-two for grade-three involves teachers constantly making connections to previous lessons and reflecting why math is important and how it helps students. In grade-four, prerequisite skills are revisited before moving on to new concepts, while in grade-five, vertical planning is executed to align with grade-four and develop skills that will provide a strong foundation for middle school math.

- Upon analysis of student work samples and State math assessment results, school leaders and teachers uncovered gaps in student knowledge in working with fractions. As a result, an additional fractions unit was developed for students in grade-two that used geometric shapes to explore concepts of halves, fourths, and whole units. Math teachers looked at fractions again to analyze specific misunderstandings found in sample grade-three State test problems. One teacher remarked, “If students have conceptual understanding, they can solve problems. They don’t need multiplication facts to solve. They need understanding. We need to create hands-on activities for them to explore fractions.” The importance of grades-one and -two math exploration in fractions was discussed. In addition, teachers discussed ways to further reinforce understanding fractions as part-to-whole relationships and separate groups or sets of a whole in order to develop conceptual understanding of what a fraction is.
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best by engaging in meaningful tasks and assessments. Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Students produce meaningful work in purposefully designed workshop format in small groups, with partners, and independently across classrooms. Additionally, teachers’ use of multiple entry points provides appropriately leveled work for diverse learners to demonstrate higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The workshop model reflects a set of beliefs about how students learn best and was implemented in most of the observed lessons. Workshop structure was apparent in a grade-four math lesson as the teacher modeled how to use rounding as a strategy to estimate the product in a multiplication problem. Using the think-aloud strategy, the teacher demonstrated her thought processes as she moved through the connection between rounding numbers and estimating answers. This was followed by a student-guided practice with partners and in small groups. The teacher moved around the classroom checking-in and then had students move to independent work with differentiated tasks and structures, depending on how students and teachers assessed their responses. In this class, students self-assessed their progress, and depending on their level of understanding, moved to one of three groups. The lower-performing students worked with another teacher on a worksheet. The higher-performing group worked on an enrichment activity, while the middle-performing group worked on equations in a textbook with word problems. During a reading lesson in a grade-one class, the teacher modeled reading out-loud using picture cues in order to successfully read a non-fiction text. She demonstrated picture cues, along with additional strategies students had already been practicing. Students practiced with a partner and then moved to independent reading while the teacher conferred with several individuals.

- Additional common practices that further illustrate the beliefs about how students learn best included questioning and discussion techniques and scaffolds that offered multiple entry points for students. Designed tasks offered differentiated support by process, task/product, and multiple intelligences. Finally, curriculum refinements that included supplemental supports and opportunities for levels of student engagement reflected purposeful Common Core standards-aligned units that met the needs of the diverse student population. In a grade-one math class, five different math centers offered opportunities for students to add and subtract numbers using a range of strategies. Further, depending on the skill levels of the student groups, number values were increased or decreased to present challenges for a range of student abilities. In a grade-four writing lesson, students worked with partners and used evidence to support a claim in order to write a paragraph for a persuasive essay guided by templates that ranged in levels of support and language.

- During a grade-four science lesson, students in small groups played a predator-prey card game, exchanging cards to collaboratively build food chains. Taking turns, they asked each other questions, such as “What eats what?”, “What’s the first food we need to find?”, and “How will we know?” The teacher walked around checking in with each group, asking them, “Why is the food chain important?”, “Why do food chains start with plants?”, and “How do they get energy?” Students who needed additional support with language choice were able to draw their choices instead of writing them down with descriptions.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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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 system of accountability fosters the implementation of high expectations. Information sharing and communication with families through online platforms support students in their academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders share high expectations with staff through a staff handbook, emails, and memoranda. They provide training, use learning walks, analyze classroom observations, and review teacher team meeting minutes as a system of accountability for those expectations. The handbook articulates specific expectations for balanced literacy that include components for readers’ and writers’ workshop, with accompanying checklists. Further, the staff handbook also delineates that math components are to include 60 to 90-minute workshops, depending on grade level. In addition, expectations related to lesson design and maintenance of a positive learning environment are included. The daily bulletin memos from the principal also serve as a venue for the sharing of high expectations. Topics include communication with families, teachers’ assessment practices, as well as upcoming professional development (PD) sessions designed to further teachers’ understanding of these high expectations. The first whole school day PD introduced Growth Mindset as an additional focus area for the new school year with training and expectations for its implementation.

- One of the systems for accountability to monitor implementation of expectations was a planned November instructional round that focused on math practices that support differentiated instruction. School leaders and two teacher teams observed student learning in 12 classrooms in 15-minute sessions. In a memo written by school leaders afterwards, observations and questions with action steps followed the instructional round. Suggestions included developing coherent and rigorous intellectual tasks and activities to support student engagement, critical thinking and discussion, as well as achievement and self-assessment by planning and embedding questioning techniques and scaffolds that offer multiple entry points. A final suggestion included the integration of conferences and feedback to students with actionable and specific steps and goals as future practice for improvement. Teachers should also embed structures and opportunities for self-assessment and revision in daily practice to ensure student engagement in self-assessment practices. This process created groundwork for future expectations in math instruction.

- School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path of college and career readiness through a family handbook, newsletters, and parent workshops that help families understand student progress toward those expectations. Tuesday family engagement time is set aside to foster parent involvement with the school in an ongoing way where school staff present, reinforce, and discuss expectations with parents. In addition, parents spoke of being involved in workshops and events regarding college and career readiness for their children, especially those of grades-four and five, whose application and enrollment for middle school was a current endeavor. School leaders invited parents to middle school presentations and events, where grade-five students met representatives from neighboring schools. The Parent Association (PA) also offers parent workshops and opportunities to communicate with other parents and school leaders.
**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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**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that include grade-level teams, vertical teams in ELA, math, and special needs, along with a grade-leader team. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

**Impact**

Teacher teams promote the achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core with instructional shifts, thereby strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Leadership opportunities help build leadership capacity in teachers, who have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school in curricular programs, materials purchased, and instructional design.

**Supporting Evidence**

- The range of teacher teams includes grade-level teams in kindergarten through grade-five, a vertical ELA planning team in grades kindergarten through two, and three through five, and a vertical planning team in math and computer science for grades kindergarten through five. In addition, there are science, advanced literacy, Response to Intervention (RtI) / Guided Reading, PBIS, and Algebra for All teams. Meeting minutes from the RtI / Special Needs Student Team, a vertical team with representatives from grades one through five, indicated the use of a Looking Collaboratively at Student Work Documenter Form that listed descriptions of two different grade-four students' written responses to non-fiction articles. Interpretations followed with teachers summarizing what each student's answer meant. This work was accomplished in session one. One week later, session two dealt with the implications and reflections regarding the student work from session one. Session three then focused on sharing practices that each teacher agreed to try out and their results. Each inquiry cycle lasts for three weeks and is focused on a single area.

- During an observed math inquiry vertical team, teachers discussed grade-three student work samples on fractions. Questions were selected from the State grade-three math assessment from spring 2018. One of the goals for 2018 - 2019 is, “All teachers will continue to engage in the inquiry process using the ‘Looking at Student Work’ protocol to analyze student work with an effort to improve practice and student achievement as measured by inquiry team data collected, teacher plans, targeted interventions, and individualized student portfolios, profiles, and work products.” This vertical math team meeting demonstrated the process and protocol for analyzing student work samples in order to determine what types of skills students exhibited and where the gaps exist. After a discussion, the teachers concluded that students must develop a deeper understanding of fractions in grade-three, with operations with fractions as a grade-four goal. Therefore, in order to fully support students’ work with fractions, students in grades-kindergarten through two needed to become comfortable with what a fraction looks like and how basic equivalents relate to each other. A grade-two unit on fractions had been developed earlier in the year. The meeting concluded with teachers thinking about what fractions could look like in kindergarten and grade-one instruction.

- Distributive structures that support teacher leadership development include the School Leadership Team (SLT), regular meetings of school leaders with grade-level leaders, as well as Professional Learning Collaborations (PLCs), and PBIS teacher leaders that discuss social and emotional programming and supports. In each team, teachers have a voice about needed instructional materials, such as additional texts for the reading and writing program and the need for additional time for looking at student work as teams.