Quality Review Report

2018-2019

P.S. 291
Elementary 10X291
2195 Andrews Avenue
Bronx
NY 10453

Principal: Carlos Velez

Dates of Review:
October 23, 2018 - October 24, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Jorge Estrella
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. 291 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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</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>
</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>
</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</th>
<th>Rating</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>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</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>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>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>
Findings

The principal makes budgetary decisions, using resources and other organizational decisions that are well-aligned to and supportive of the school’s instructional goals and long-range action plans. Purposeful hiring practices, teacher assignments, and student programming are strategic for groups of students.

Impact

School leaders’ strategic approach to the school's master schedule consistently promotes high levels of expertise and accountable collaboration among staff to increase college and career readiness resulting in improved instruction and student outcomes by targeting the needs and strengths of groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders ensure that each classroom is equipped with whiteboards, computers, and tablets for use during instruction, with the purpose of increasing student engagement in meaningful work. In math classes, students were observed using an instructional web-based platform that allows students to work on lessons tailored to their learning needs. In a science classroom students were engaged in a research project on laptops. Students also engaged in project-based learning activities where flyers, business cards and videos are created. During station teaching, students rotate to various stations to complete a variety of tasks, either with a partner or independently. The inclusion of technology and the licensing of several web-based instructional platforms support teachers in their ability to differentiate instruction. Students interact with several websites using an individualized login, thus providing the teacher with progress data that is used for curricular planning to meet the student's individual needs. In addition, and in alignment with the school focus on small group instruction, all classrooms have small round tables in the hallways, which are used to provide small group instruction to address the specific instructional or social-emotional needs of students.

- In order to maximize the use of resources, school leaders ensure that all paraprofessionals receive ongoing professional learning opportunities so that the neediest students receive quality instructional supports. Paraprofessionals were observed working with small groups, providing native language supports to students, as well as Academic Intervention Services (AIS). In a literacy class with the support of paraprofessionals, English Language Learners (ELLs) were using tablets with software to engage in vocabulary development tasks. As a result of this strategic approach for AIS services, the English Language Arts (ELA) average proficiency levels of ELLs on the New York State (NYS) examinations moved from 2.26 in 2017 to 2.47 in 2018. Which is higher than the district and comparison group.

- School leaders and teachers shared that the hiring process involves school leaders, coaches, and teachers. Once candidates are identified, they are informed of the school's model and mission, then participate in demonstration lessons and interviews. Once teachers are on board, they are provided with ongoing support including professional development and mentoring. Teachers' and students’ schedules are created based on students’ needs and teachers’ expertise. For example, the core subjects in grades four and five are departmentalized. This allows teachers to deepen their content knowledge and develop teaching practices specific to the subject area to which they are assigned, as well as to collaborate to support one another and further student progress. Furthermore, the master schedule is modified at least three times a year with the purpose to better serve the needs of students and to provide targeted AIS. In addition, students have opportunities to participate in after school and Saturday programs to engage in remedial, enrichment and extracurricular activities. As a result of this strategic approach for AIS services, the ELA average proficiency levels of students with disabilities on the NYS examinations moved from 2.03 in 2017 to 2.11 in 2018, which is higher than the city, district and comparison group.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect the belief that students learn best when teachers are facilitators and students explore and develop learning tasks in small group instruction using the workshop model. Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points to engage all learners.

Impact
Most teachers act as facilitators by arranging classes for small group instruction to promote student interactions. However, in some classes, the lack of strategic high quality supports and extensions hinders high levels of engagement and the consistent demonstration of thinking through the production of meaningful work products for all learners.

Supporting Evidence
- Teaching practices across classrooms reflect an articulated belief about how students learn best, which includes a student centered approach, group or paired work and differentiated instruction. Classrooms are organized with print rich resources, and are equipped with technology and web-based instructional platforms to accelerate learning. Within this environment, teachers create stations where students have opportunities to work in groups, pairs, or independently. For example, in a kindergarten English as a New Language (ENL) class literacy lesson based on how words are represented in written language, students were placed in groups, working in stations and provided with resources such as magnetic letters, alphabet chart, dry erase markers, whiteboards, and activity sheets. As a result, all students are provided with multiple approaches to support their learning.

- Across classrooms students were engaged in rigorous tiered activities and tasks, including ELLs and students with disabilities. In observed lessons, students were assigned to different stations and worked in groups as they engaged in differentiated tasks to accomplish the learning target of the lesson. For example, in a self-contained math class, some students were working with the teacher, another group were using manipulatives and graphic organizers, while others were working independently. The teacher implemented a rotation system to ensure that all students had opportunities to have access to technology as well as one-on-one support either from the teacher or paraprofessional. While students were working independently, the teacher moved around the room monitoring students’ progress. However, in few classrooms, this strategic practice of providing embedded differentiated entry points is yet to be fully implemented.

- Students in a first grade ENL math class engaged in work centered on mathematical expressions. The lesson included multiple entry points utilizing various stations. While students were engaged in their assignments, the teacher circulated about the room monitoring progress and providing one-on-one assistance including native language support to ELLs. In addition to direct language support, the teachers used total physical response strategies and a kinesthetic approach to engage students in critical thinking activities where students have to match mathematical expressions with classmates around the classroom. This resulted in a high energy class, where students were given the opportunity to make their thinking visible. In other ENL classes, teachers are still incorporating some ENL strategies and in some instances, some teachers are yet to incorporate high quality supports and extensions for higher achievers.
Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders and teachers have selected curricula aligned to the Common Core across grades and subject areas that integrate the instructional shifts by exposing students to fiction and nonfiction text, with a focus on academic vocabulary and text-based evidence. The curricula also consistently emphasize rigorous tasks and higher-order skills across grades and subject areas.

**Impact**

The school uses a coherent curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards that promote college and career readiness for a diversity of learners which consistently emphasizes higher-order skills.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders make certain that through an inquiry process teachers design and evaluate the curriculum to ensure the implementation of effective teaching practices that align with the Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. A review of instructional planning documents reveals that teachers plan to use certain shifts, such as text-based evidence, writing from sources, and academic vocabulary, which builds coherence across the curricula, as well as promotes college and career readiness. This was evident in planning documents requiring students to read the book *Animal Behavior: Animal Defenses, Poisonous Prey* as a central text to examine the essential question “How do animals use poison to survive?” A fourth grade math unit reflects the focus on academic vocabulary such as, "numerals," “algorithms," “diagrams,” “decompose,” and “equation.” The unit also requires students to justify their mathematical thinking by explaining their answers and using different approaches to solve math problems.

- School leaders and faculty focus on math, specifically in number talks with the purpose of strengthening student accuracy, efficiency, and flexibility with mental math and computation strategies. The review of instructional planning documents revealed that teachers are drafting lessons for classroom conversations focused on making sense of mathematics, clarifying their mathematical thinking, investigating and applying mathematical relationships, building a repertoire of efficient strategies, making decisions about choosing efficient strategies for specific problems, considering and testing other strategies to see if they are mathematically logical. The approach to teaching math ranges from concrete to abstract, while incorporating real life situations. To enhance instruction, teachers plan lessons to include technological stations where students can experience differentiated tasks based on individual learning goals as determined by previously submitted work or assessments. Instructional web-based platforms individualize instruction during student engagement to ensure that they are constantly challenged with their task.

- The project-based learning curricula addressed the instructional shifts while promoting the use of collaborative learning strategies and innovative instructional techniques to structure thematic learning that drives students’ acquisition of content and skill. The culminating product of these activities are school projects where students demonstrate mastery in a research process, data collection, creative writing, and artistic representation of their learning. Examples of these projects include; opening a pizzeria, designing rockets, and opening a taco truck. For these project-based learning activities, students have to identify interest and needs by creating surveys, design logos, design the infrastructure of their business, determine a marketing strategy, which could include catchy songs, videos, billboards, flyers, and business cards. The culminating activity is project presentations and showcase.
## Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:** 2.2 Assessment  
**Rating:** Proficient  

### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula as tools for giving clear feedback to students. In addition, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

Assessment practices provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers’ individual assessment practices result in effective instructional adjustments during classroom instruction and in modifications to subsequent lessons, meeting all students’ needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- Students and teachers reported that they use rubrics across content areas. In the student work presented, rubrics that have been reviewed with students were evident. Hallways and classroom bulletin boards display student work with tasks, rubrics, and actionable next steps. During the student meeting, students presented work from different subject areas and mentioned that they received feedback from teachers and that they use rubrics in their assignments which contributes to having a better understanding of their work and offers guidance to improve their grades and academic levels. For example, one student said, “I did a good job putting together three details. I will continue to add two details and describing the illustrations.” Another student mentioned, “I need to work on looking at the text carefully to explain my thinking.” Furthermore, the review of students’ work revealed that teachers provide actionable rubric-based feedback presented in language and form accessible for the student. For example, “Work on how to write clear sentences to explain process. Continue to use a place value chart to show your thinking and organization. When confident, try rounding and dividing without visual support.” However, some of the reviewed student work still shows checks and percentages, missing opportunities to offer actionable feedback. As a result, some students are not aware of their next steps to improve their work.

- Across most classes, teachers used multiple checks for understanding to monitor student understanding during lessons. This practice is progressing to meet learning targets. Some of the checks for understanding approaches include: the teacher circulating the room to check student entrance ticket responses, cold calling, questioning for explanation, hand signals, and exit tickets used to gather information about both individual and whole-group learning. Most teachers have an assessment tool to record students’ responses and, in some cases, teachers made on-the-spot adjustments to instruction. A fourth-grade literacy teacher noticed that some students working with partners were having difficulty making inference with details and examples from pictures and texts. The teacher asked students to change partners so they can help each other accomplish their learning targets, allowing higher achievers to support their peers. However, this effective approach of implementing the use of checks for understanding is yet to be fully implemented in the vast majority of classrooms.

- School leaders and teachers reported that they incorporated self-assessment activities as part of their regular practice. Students shared that in most assignments, they are engaged in self-assessments practices using rubrics or checklists. They added that this practice is being used on a daily basis. This was evident in the review of student work products where students self-assessed their work, and this practice was observed during instruction. For example, in a literacy assignment, one student reflected “I need to write the main idea in my own words and use proper text details.”
**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate expectations for high levels of shared accountability aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching to the entire staff and provide them with professional learning opportunities to meet such expectations. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

**Impact**

A culture of collaboration and mutual accountability exists between staff and school leaders towards high expectations where all students, including high-need subgroups are prepared for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations related to academic performance for all students to the staff through several sources including staff handbooks, classroom expectation checklist, emails, coaching sessions, individual conferences that are devoted to creating a shared understanding of effective teaching practices. Professional learning is also provided to all faculty, especially those who are rated ineffective or developing. According to the most recent Learning Environment Survey, “100 percent of teachers say that the principal makes clear to the staff his expectations for meeting instructional goals.” Additionally, teachers are held to high expectations through frequent cycles of observation and feedback, intervisitations, and initial planning conferences. Teachers stated that the principal sets clear expectations for teaching and learning through an explicit school-wide instructional focus on “student-centered learning”, and a theory of action that holds all teachers accountable for delivering high quality data-driven instruction, with multiple entry points in a small group setting where teachers act as facilitators of the learning process.

- School leaders build school capacity via professional learning opportunities for teachers wherein school coaches and teachers engage in peer-to-peer intervisitations. During intervisitations teachers use tools and protocols linked to specific components by observing lessons and providing colleagues with formative feedback so that a deeper understanding of effective practices to meet instructional expectations is fostered. Teachers participate in school surveys, providing feedback about professional development, progress of schoolwide initiatives and school culture. These mutual accountability practices allow school leaders to make the necessary adjustments to address teachers’ professional needs.

- School leaders, and staff maintain ongoing communication with families and students regarding requirements for middle school applications through workshops, school fairs, school visits, and one-on-one conferences with families. They are also invited to visit classroom to learn about the critical skills the students need to succeed and to better understand the demands of the Common Core and next level readiness in middle schools. Students explained the middle school articulation process, and felt well supported by school staff, as well as prepared for the next step. Families shared that their children receive challenging assignments especially in math where students are exposed to new methodologies to solve math problems. During instructional celebrations, students from lower grades are invited to participate in upper grade students’ presentations. This enables students to build self-esteem that will better prepare them for their own ongoing educational experience and prepare them for the next level. As a result, the Next-Level Readiness data increased from 92 percent in 2017 to 95 percent in 2018, which is equal to the city level and higher than the district and comparison group.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

All teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaboration that promotes the implementation of the Common Core aligned curricula to engage all learners. Distributive leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Professional collaborations have resulted in improved instructional planning that promotes school goals, strengthens pedagogical practices and builds leadership capacity. Teacher voice has impacted the development of instructional materials and behavior standards that affect student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders ensure that all teachers are scheduled for vertical and horizontal weekly teacher-team meetings, as well as inquiry based collaborations. Through these collaborative meetings school leaders and staff establish a common language, look at student work and analyze data, create focused goals, identify learning trends in literacy and math, and develop rigorous academic tasks. This includes discussions on how to improve teacher pedagogical practice and student learning. As one teacher indicated “Teacher team meetings have been instrumental to networking with colleagues, as well as to sharing best practices, while collectively learning about the strengths and needs of our students.” These efforts have yet to result in significant improvement of students’ outcomes as informed by a slight three percentage point increase comparing the 2017 with the 2018 New York State ELA.

- The observed grade three teacher team adhered to the Tuning protocol as it is applied to several samples of student work related to math class entrance tickets. Teachers highlighted which students showed progress and which students struggled with the assignment. Teachers used the Math Data Analysis Tool (MDAT) to record students’ misconceptions and errors, then, worked in pairs to determine that most students had mastered adding three-digit numbers but most students faced challenges to add four-digit numbers. Teachers then discussed the use of manipulatives, how to scaffold the level of complexity, and identified small groups. Teacher team agendas and minutes indicate that during weekly professional collaborations, teachers align their team’s work to the school’s instructional goals and the Common Core. For example, based on an instructional school-based survey, teachers noticed that the math curriculum needed modifications to address the instructional needs of students with disabilities and ELLs, so they made curricular modifications to include the use of technology, multiple entry-points, and scaffolds. Although inquiry team sessions support the improvement of instructional practice, these efforts are yet to yield a significant increase in students’ achievement as per the NYS math assessments.

- School leaders promote teacher leadership with opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process. The school provides opportunities to teachers to become instructional coaches, ENL or special needs coordinator, and become members of the cabinet which is comprised of literacy and math coaches, teachers, AIS team members, school leaders, and a guidance counselor. School leaders, and teachers shared that their voice is represented in schoolwide activities, curricula, and instructional initiatives. Teachers collaborate regularly with school leaders to select instructional resources as well as design and facilitate professional learning. The 2018 School Survey shows that 100 percent of teachers reported that they have a moderate to great deal of influence over school policy in the area of developing instructional materials and influence over school policy in the area of setting standards for student behavior.