Quality Review Report

2018-2019

P.S./M.S. 11X498 - VAN NEST ACADEMY
K-8 11X498
1640 Bronxdale Ave
Bronx
NY 10462

Principal: Carol Ann Gilligan

Dates of Review:
February 27, 2019 - February 28, 2019

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


School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
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<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>Proficient</td>
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# School Quality Ratings continued

## School Culture

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

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<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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## 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>Area of Focus</td>
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<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>
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<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>
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<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>
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Area of Celebration

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

The school’s approach to culture-building, discipline, and social-emotional support is informed by a theory of action and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to provide a supportive and mutually-respectful learning environment with structures in place to reinforce academic success.

Impact

The schoolwide practice of recognizing and embracing the diversity of the school community results in a safe environment that supports progress toward school goals where student voice is meaningfully involved in instructional and multicultural decision-making schoolwide activities. All students are well known by more than one adult who help support and coordinate academic and social-emotional learning.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty have refined structures that promote an inclusive and positive learning environment. Since the school's inception, school leaders designed a theory of action that is grounded on a school community that celebrates the diverse ethnic backgrounds and their individual identities, taking time to learn the stories of all students, staff, and families. Students have a voice in decision making through student council, which meets regularly and is involved in schoolwide decision-making activities. This includes making a video about important African-Americans in fields of politics and social activism, literature, science, sports, music, and art. Members of the student council will edit the video and make presentations across grades and classrooms. Students shared that they read books from authors from different ethnic groups and nationalities, and that they have a voice in the planning of instructional field trips. Ensuring that student voice is included and is able to guide the school decision making and planning process has a positive impact on academic and personal growth, and creates a pathway to build leadership skills and work habits that support college and career readiness.

- School leaders and teachers created the PBIS schoolwide matrix that recognizes students when they display exemplary academic and personal behaviors. The acronym HEROES emphasizes the school's core values of H-helping others; E-engaging in learning; R-respecting all people and property; O-organized; E-everyday responsible; S-safe, first and always. Students stated that they feel safe, enjoy coming to school, and are respected by the staff and peers. Interviewed students disclosed that they do not have any recollection of disciplinary issues in their classrooms or common areas. There exists an excellent rapport and mutual respect between adults and students. As a result, the school is sustaining zero level five incidents as per the Online Occurrence Reporting System Report data.

- Guidance counselors provide weekly character education assemblies to all students K-8, where curriculum is used to teach the importance of learning, increase student self-motivation and provide staff and families with concrete data on the underlying issues that students confront which may impact their academic achievement. In addition, the guidance counselor coordinates social services for families with local organizations. Students also added that in the event that they may need emotional support or if they are in any stage of distress, there is more than one adult in the school that they trust will help them cope with their issues. Parents also praised school efforts to ensure that all students are safe and are well known by all staff members. School leaders established a strong attendance team which monitors and follows up on all absences and lateness on a daily basis. Parent outreach is made for excessive absences and a plan is developed for improvement. Students and classes earn HEROES bucks for 100 percent attendance. As a result of the positive reinforcement efforts, the school attendance rate is 95.7 percent.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 3.1 Goals and Action Plans
Rating: Proficient

Findings
Goal-setting and effective action planning are guided by the school's instructional focus which is informed by a comprehensive data-driven needs assessment. School leaders involve and communicate with the school community regarding school improvement plans and decision-making processes.

Impact
Although school leaders leverage several opportunities to communicate with stakeholders regarding the school improvement plan and decision-making processes, they are yet to fully involve and communicate with all constituents on the creation of the goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Based on schoolwide data from standardized assessments, school survey, Advance, and walkthroughs, school leaders and teachers developed a “IF (Instructional Focus) Look-Fors” document to support the implementation of the instructional focus. This artifact details what students and teachers should be saying and doing, which highlights such practices as the use of rubrics by students to self- and peer–assess, revision of rubrics to make expectations clear to students, staff, and parents and the establishment of a universal norm for writing in all subject areas and grades. At the beginning of the school year, school leaders and teachers engage in one-on-one sessions to develop goals that are aligned to the schoolwide goals, the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and the instructional focus. The school offers a series of professional development (PD) opportunities using several formats such as; one-one support from school leaders, consultants, coach, or peers, as well as intervisitations, and differentiated PD sessions.

- Teachers analyze data from mid-term assessments, as well as the New York State (NYS) English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics exams. The third-grade ELA results showed that students struggled with determining or clarifying the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases due to the passage being above the student's reading level and the inability to use context clues. The teachers planned to continue with the schoolwide independent reading program, by setting goals for individual students such as using more explicit teaching with context clues, using grade-level passages, and more practice with multiple choice questions such as dissecting/elimination process. The fourth-grade math results showed that students had difficulty with comparing two multi-digit numbers based on meanings of the digits in each place, and the use of >, =, and < symbols to record the results of comparisons. To address this, teachers planned to expose students to similar questions and focus on the importance of stating what place value they are using and comparing those numbers. Based on the itemized analysis teachers set goals for individual students, classes, and grades.

- School leaders leverage opportunities to communicate the direction of the school via faculty conferences, Chancellor's Conference Day, professional planning meetings, and Parent-Teacher Association and School Leadership Team meetings. In addition, the school survey provides stakeholders with insight into the perceptions and concerns of students, resulting in students' opinions influencing school-level decision-making regarding schoolwide events and activities. However, in the interview with parents and teachers, it was noticeable that some were not able to fully articulate the school’s goals and or their involvement in the goal setting process. As a result, the school has yet to ensure an in-depth understanding of the school goals by the entire community.
Additional Finding

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and real-world academic tasks are embedded coherently across grades and subjects.

Impact
The strategic integration of the instructional shifts is resulting in coherence that promotes college and career readiness skills across grades and subject areas promoting student thinking, for all students including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers consistently seek curricular materials that meet the needs of students. The review of instructional planning documents revealed that school leaders and teachers are using a curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. School leaders and teachers shared that curricula and programs at the school are refined to suit the needs of all students. Furthermore, Understanding by Design is used in the planning process to guide curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For example, ELA units of study include Common Core Learning Standards, unit focus, student understandings, content skills, essential questions, vocabulary, assessments, differentiation opportunities, modifications for ELLs, and students with disabilities. Similar format and content is used across all content areas including art, music, and physical education. This coherent curricular approach helps teachers prepare all students for college and career opportunities.

- An emphasis on the instructional shifts is evident when planning curricular experiences across grades and content. All ELA lesson plans identify instructional outcomes which require students to validate opinions both orally and in writing, closely read rigorous text, use academic vocabulary in multiple settings, cull data and relevant information from multiple sources, and draw valid conclusions. A seventh-grade social studies lesson, includes an essential question “How does the Bill of Rights of the Constitution protect the rights of Americans accused, arrested, convicted of crimes?” requiring students to read independently, do a close reading of the summary, analyze and restate Amendments in their own words with peers, and engage in group discussion using academic vocabulary. Students will use a “Rights of the Victim/Rights of the Accused” worksheet to develop an opinion and make an argument from the sources, thus promoting college and career readiness skills.

- School leaders and teachers engage in collaborative planning sessions for vertical coherence, to plan and conduct K-8 lesson studies, and to revise current units based on benchmark and performance task data. All unit plans and revisions are entered on an online curriculum document so all staff can view, plan, add, revise and monitor adjustments, while the program reports on whether unit plans and assessments target and assess all standards required for the unit. The review of instructional planning documents revealed that higher-order skills and rigorous habits are promoted across all grades and subjects for all students including ELLs and students with disabilities. Lesson plans include activities that require students to engage in higher-order thinking, take and support positions, and engage in applying relevance to the concepts they learned in connection to the real-world. This was evident in a seventh-grade math lesson in which students were required to demonstrate understanding of finding the final cost of an item after a markdown (discount) and markup (tax) within the real-world. The lesson included an instructional field trip to a local store. Interviewed students, reported that their engagement in these type of activities has helped them have an in-depth understanding of percentages and become wise consumers.
### Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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#### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to and reflect an articulated set of beliefs, including a focus on rigorous opportunities for students to conduct conferences with one another and their teachers. Teachers offer students multiple opportunities for student-to-students discussions.

#### Impact

As a result of a collective approach to how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts, student work products reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

#### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders’ and teachers’ belief about how students learn best is informed by the school’s instructional focus, “If we plan for and provide daily rigorous opportunities for students to conduct conferences with one another and their teachers about their reading, writing, and problem solving skills, reinforcing that they communicate their progress and justify their thinking to others, students will then be more engaged in their learning through all subject areas and have a full stake in their own improved academic performance.” In most classrooms, teachers had students engaged in their learning, with opportunities to collaborate and discuss their thoughts in groups and whole class discussions, as per the school’s instructional focus which aligns to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In a multi-level English as a New Language independent reading class, while students were reading, the teacher engaged with small groups of students and provided them with next steps in writing and strategies for reading. The teacher took conferencing notes as she circulated to the groups and gave opportunities to engage in small group discussions about their readings by providing guiding questions such as; “What is interesting about the title of this chapter?” or “Why does the driver think only the woman sitting in 8A could be Amal’s grandmother? What can you infer about the woman in seat 8A?”

- Across classrooms visited, tasks and lessons facilitated student participation and promoted student-to-student conversations and student-generated questions. The Socratic approach, using inner circle and outer circles was observed in an eighth-grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) science class where students were engaged in discussions to reflect their knowledge of force, velocity, and mass. Students’ interactions used accountable talk prompts such as “I would like to add to her comment” or “I agreed with what he said, however, I think…” Both teachers circulated about the room ensuring that students from both groups were actively engaged either by taking notes or participating in the discussions. At the middle of the lesson, to ensure that all students had equal voice and opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions, teachers switched the students’ roles in the inner and outer circles. As a result of these teaching strategies, most students had opportunities to fully engage in their lessons and make their thinking visible.

- Teaching strategies to engage students in high levels of collaboration and discussion to produce cognitive engagement were observed. In a sixth-grade ICT class, students were assigned to work in flexible groups solving percentages problems. Students who solved correctly based on the rubric and teachers’ check, were assigned to conduct conferences with students who struggled. During these interactions, all students observed were engaged in meaningful discussions supporting an increased level of mastery and understanding when students then engaged in whole class discussions.
Additional Finding

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

Teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school’s curricula. Across classrooms, teachers’ assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

As a result of engaging students in analyzing and interpreting rubrics, most students have a clear understanding of how to use rubrics and take action based upon feedback, and next steps regarding their academic achievement. Teachers make effective adjustments to instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and students use Common Core-aligned rubrics across grades and subjects to ensure students have a clear comprehension of what they are expected to accomplish in their writing work, tasks, and projects. Rubrics are genre and project-specific. For example, a second-grade narrative writing for a friendly letter rubric guides students to ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions of writing, and presentation. This rubric includes scale levels from 1-4. Students shared that they use rubrics in all content areas and articulated that rubrics are provided before their assignments and in some cases they are engaged in analyzing rubrics. This was corroborated in a fifth-grade ICT class where students in a small group setting were unpacking a rubric for fable writing by analyzing and interpreting a trait and grading a fable using a concept web. As a result, teachers equip students with the necessary understanding of the different elements they should take into consideration to complete their assignments.

- The review of student work products revealed that teacher feedback on student work is rooted in the form of teacher comments followed by next steps based on rubrics used to assess student work. In a seventh-grade short response assignment, the teacher commented “Amazing work taking your response one step further but be sure to review your work to check conventions. Your next steps are to elaborate more and to use more specific vocabulary to explain your answers.” A teacher’s feedback in math reads, “Make sure to explain how the variable would change and impact the investigation.” During a meeting, students articulated the value of teachers’ feedback which they use to reflect upon their progress and to inform next steps for improvements.

- Across classrooms, assessment practices reflect a consistency with regard to the use of ongoing checks for understanding. Teachers were observed conferring with students to clarify the concepts and/or essential skills to address potential students’ deficiencies. Also, students were observed using hand gestures such as thumbs-up and quizzes to gauge for academic improvement. Those formative assessment practices were observed in an eighth-grade science class where the teacher circulated about the room as students engaged in group discussions, listened to students’ interactions, and without disrupting the flow of the discussions, provided feedback on sticky notes to encourage their level of participation, or use the evidence of their experiments to support their claims. As a result of these assessment practices, most teachers are able to make at-the-moment modifications to instruction and address individual instructional needs.

- Students regularly use self- and peer-evaluation tools in conjunction with standardized rubrics to reflect on their learning. This is followed with teacher conversation and feedback on next steps. For example, as a self-reflection of an essay about Russia, a student wrote “My next steps are to add more details to my draft so the reader understands my writing better. Also, I need to check my spelling and provide verb tenses that are correct because some are incorrect and that will distract the reader a little bit.”
**Additional Finding**

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

All teachers engage in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations in grades and department teams which include such activities as Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI). School leaders have embedded distributed leadership and shared decision making practices throughout the school.

### Impact

Schoolwide instructional coherence promotes the implementation of the Common Core, resulting in increased student achievement for all learners as teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders ensure that all teacher teams are organized by grade levels for kindergarten to grade two and department teams for grades three to five and six to eight. During these sessions, teachers plan/revise units, lessons, assessments, and rubrics based on student work and data. The review of teacher team documents revealed that teachers identify standards that are not being mastered, leading them to strategize and create a plan as to how to increase understanding. They either work as a lesson study team planning a single lesson, while one person implements and the others observe and give feedback to see if their joint ideas worked or they resolve to try ideas on their own and bring back results at the next meeting. This practice was observed during the principal choice activity, where teachers were debriefing an ICT science lesson with the learning target, "I can discuss possible science concepts for real world phenomena based on energy." Observers used a low inference note catcher tool and the peer observation analysis worksheet to offer glows and grows to the host teachers. This level of collaboration has strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers, by supporting one another’s development of instructional supports for all students.

- Furthermore, as part of their inquiry-based practice teacher teams also engaged in CGI where teachers identify areas or standards in which students underperform according to NYS exam items, diagnostics, formative data, conducted CGI’s in math or conferences with students in all subjects to see their thinking as they problem solve or create. Teachers then collaboratively plan for misconceptions of the standards in upcoming units in horizontal grade and vertical department teams, revising instruction and the assessment tools to address those areas and gauge student understanding. The results of NYS standardized assessments in ELA and math are showing an average increase of 19 percent comparing results of 2017 with 2018, which in both cases are higher than the city, district, and comparison group.

- School leaders and teachers shared that their voice is respected and they are empowered to make key decisions involving curriculum and hiring practices that affect the school and student learning. For example, math teachers develop vertically-aligned mixed review word problems to reinforce close reading strategies and improve interpretation skills. Teachers are key players in the hiring process as evidenced by one of the teachers explaining his hiring experience in which teachers were involved. Other structures to promote distributive leadership include, facilitating team meetings, turnkeying learning opportunities through facilitation of PD and being empowered to make curricular adjustments. The principal reported that when a new program is presented to the school, teachers are asked to pilot it first on a small scale to then decide whether or not the program is viable in support of student learning before launching it. As a result, effective professional collaborations have taken root and increased trust in distributed leadership, better communication about what is happening across grades, and coherence in team planning work.