Quality Review Report

2018-2019

P.S. X721 - Stephen McSweeney School
High school 75X721
2697 Westchester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10461

Principal: Frank Degennaro

Dates of Review:
January 15, 2019 - January 16, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Buffie Whitfield
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>
</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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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

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

Findings
A highly supportive and extended family culture is evident throughout the school. Social emotional structures such as Pupil Personnel Team (PPT) are in place and consistently employed.

Impact
The theory of action of working to learn and learning to work results in a safe environment and inclusive culture that supports progress toward yearly goals and meaningfully involves student voice. All students are known well by more than one adult who helps to personalize attendance supports and coordinate social-emotional learning.

Supporting Evidence
- The mantra of the school is “Where we learn to work and work to learn.” From the outset, students learn how to work when they walk through the door and discover that the majority of the students participate in a full-time worksite that provides job training and employment opportunities. Students are taught independence, self-motivation, resilience, persistence, and communication. Students stated they are more communicative and independent due to attending the school. Throughout the various sites, students are practicing interview skills and engaging in conversations. Advocacy is vital and expressed by school leaders, parents and teachers. At the Montefiore worksite, students shared they have an opportunity to become permanent staff members, but they need to work hard, be present punctually and advocate for themselves.

- All staff members are accessible and share information and practices to support students’ needs. Pupil Personnel teams discuss strategies such as identifying antecedent behaviors prior to outburst, and sensory stimulation to serve greater numbers of students. As a result, there has been a decrease in behavioral incidents across the sites. Students share that they have changed their behavior. “I like going to the worksite and I need to behave like an adult to work.” Another student shared, “I like traveling on my own instead of taking the school bus.” Parents attested that their children’s behavior has improved. All parents stated they are going to miss the school when students graduate because it is a second home for their child. Students realized that as they continue their education at 75X721 they become more independent and can manage their behavior.

- Teachers guide students’ social-emotional learning to decrease the number of behavior infractions and suspensions. To support staff in assisting students in developing pro-social behaviors and behavioral management, the guidance counselor team created a school-wide Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) that includes protocols to support behavioral needs of individual students, including Pupil Personnel Team (PPT) meetings with the student's team, assistance with data collection and review, as well as classroom management supports, such as cool down corners (Sensory Rooms). As a result of these supports, all sites show a 43 percent decrease in Online Occurrence Reports, incident levels one to three, from the 2016-2017 school year to the 2017-2018 school year.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 5.1 Monitoring and Revising Systems | Rating: | Proficient |

Findings

School leaders have a process in place to regularly evaluate and adjust curricula, pedagogy, and assessment practices in response to student learning needs. School leaders and teachers have a process in place to review the quality of pedagogical feedback.

Impact

Although school leaders and staff have a protocol to monitor and adjust systems and practices related to Common Core learning standards, what is necessary to affect student mastery is not as yet in place.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have been effective in refining their capacity for improvement by supporting the work of collaborative teacher teams both horizontally and vertically. These teams have streamlined their planning and inquiry by routinely analyzing student work using research-based protocols and utilizing the results to make curricular and instructional adjustments in response to student learning needs. During cabinet meetings school leaders review the agendas, minutes, and recommendations of teacher teams in an effort to coherently integrate the Common Core Learning Standards (Common Core). However, while the principal speaks to processes to evaluate instructional and organizational practices of the school, some of the interactions with teacher teams across the three school sites have not been memorialized or recorded consistently. As a result, there are missed opportunities to effect more timely revisions to curriculum and teacher practice.

- Teacher teams meet to review curricula, the implementation of effective teaching practices, and the quality of assessment practices to gauge student understanding. This work has helped teachers reflect on decisions on how to make the curricula more engaging and rigorous. Most teachers utilize an online platform to glean best practices from each other to strengthen the teaching of the instructional core to avoid gaps in teaching, learning, planning, and assessment across the school. Staff members and school leaders articulated next steps to try to provide meaningful feedback aligned to the Common Core so that more students can internalize the feedback.

- School leaders observe teachers frequently. In some cases, administrators are not normed or calibrated in their feedback. Additionally, although teachers are involved in an inquiry group to improve students’ academic outcomes, protocols to share team findings on an ongoing basis are less formalized. This limits teachers’ capacity to fully evaluate students’ varied learning needs and make additional data-informed decisions on implementing new instructional approaches that maximize students’ achievement across content areas and support student mastery.

- During instructional cabinet meetings curricular documents and assessment tools are revised to ensure that they provide access to all students. Conversations are held regarding how well teachers across grades are using standards and reflecting on how well lessons are taught. The cabinet reviews assessment data including performance tasks, to make correlations between what is taught and how well students are understanding the content. Additionally, school leaders are incorporating reviews of teacher feedback to students to ensure that all students are cognizant of the feedback and students are progressing as a result of the feedback. The instructional coach and teacher leads are privy to information that enables other staff to make strategic decisions related to elements of the instructional core. While these conversations take place within cabinet meetings, there is not a formalized system to ensure that all members of the school community are involved with these conversations and the monitoring and revising process.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

All curricula are strategically aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and illustrate integration of Career Development Occupational Standards (CDOS), and the instructional shifts in discussion. Teachers collaborate to develop rigorous and coherently-sequenced tasks for all learners.

Impact

All students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs), have ready access to curricula designed to promote college and career readiness. Academic tasks provide multiple opportunities for all students to demonstrate high levels of thinking across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- The school’s curriculum maps are used cohesively across the organization and align to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum maps include supports such as sentence strategies to build complexity and clarity and well-structured summaries, paragraphs, argumentative essays and essential questions such as “How can we use elements of a story to make a prediction about a text?” Teachers of students who are alternately assessed focus their planning and curricula on the use of functional vocabulary for daily living skills, use of money, measurement and time, and student behavioral and social-emotional needs. Curricula are also centered on embedding real-world experiences and inclusion of the CDOS across the curriculum.

- Lesson plans in all subjects include a pre- and post-assessment, core vocabulary, hands-on materials, and a selection of adaptations, including the need for assistive communication. The assistive communication provides students access to concepts and skills taught based on individual student needs. Additionally, students’ individual goals are integrated into plans so that there are maximum opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to address Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals in an integrated way during small-group content-specific instruction. Teacher unit and lesson plans included evidence of tiered higher-order tasks and groupings, vocabulary, assessments, preferred mode of communication and specially designed instructional notes. An ELA lesson on writing included intentional details on how students, some of whom are non-verbal, would respond to the task by nodding their heads, turning towards or away from the item or pointing to a yes or no card.

- The full implementation of the Unique Curriculum for alternate-assessment students across all sites and service categories ensures cohesive instruction in core content areas. Students in inclusion follow the Common Core-based curriculum aligned with their general education peers with the support of teachers and paraprofessionals. Attention to and the integration of the Common Core and the instructional shifts that are included within curriculum maps for all core subject areas for alternate-assessment students consistently provides learners at all levels with opportunities to engage in learning experiences that support the generalization of skills learned to other content area and then to vocational pursuits. In addition, the curriculum provides for the use of varied augmentative communication devices, such as instruments that have multiple buttons for students to push that activate a voice output that has been pre-recorded for students who are unable to speak. This ensures that students have access to and are able to share their learning as well as to cement the focus on high levels of engagement. This has led to a high number of students being hired after volunteering at 10 work sites.
### Additional Finding

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

Teaching practices, informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, reflect beliefs that students learn best when they engage in real-life experiences. Teaching approaches strategically provide multiple entry points and supports into the curricula.

#### Impact

Students of all ability levels have access and are engaged in suitably challenging tasks and produce meaningful work products that push them toward their learning targets and goals.

#### Supporting Evidence

- The school consistently practices their beliefs that students learn best when learning takes place through hands-on, real life experiences where multiple opportunities to practice skills are offered. In addition, there are strong practices in place to increase the levels of peer-to-peer communication for students whose disabilities demonstrate struggles in communicating. To ensure this occurs, individual and programmatic augmentative communication devices (ACC) support instruction. To support verbal students, the school consistently provides social scripts for students to follow when interacting with peers and adults.

- Across sites, strong teaching practices provide multiple entry points across the curriculum to support students' varied learning needs. For example, differentiated instruction is augmented through visual supports, ACC devices, iPads, SMART board usage and individual, group and peer supports, results in high levels of engagement with learning tasks. In all classrooms, students are grouped for instruction based on formative assessments of functional levels and ongoing data collection and are provided with learning tasks that are a part of or extensions to the tiered Unique curriculum being implemented. For example, in order to extend vocabulary development and communication skills, tasks for speech-impaired students are designed with pictures and corresponding words so that students, with the aid of computers, are able to construct multiple sentences that allow them to communicate their thinking, and thus support their instructional levels. In all classes, paraprofessionals and related service providers such as speech and occupational therapists support mandated students as well as others in small groups during instructional periods. Classroom visits confirm that the majority of students are highly engaged in learning tasks where frequent supported opportunities to communicate were evident as students demonstrated their thinking and learning.

- Paraprofessionals worked in concert with teachers to impact student learning. Students worked one-on-one with paraprofessionals as the teacher rotated to each student to provide additional support. In an ELA class, students interviewed each other and guided the conversations using focused questions, such as, “describe your family, what is your future dream job and what three words describe you?” The students were supported in building paragraphs based on their interview responses. In another class, students used pictures to help stimulate visual senses. The teacher asked what picture represented a title, character, or setting. Students pointed and placed pictures under the appropriate column based on categories. The teacher modeled with pictures and students were able to identify the correct response.
### Findings
The school has a coherent structure of common assessments aligned to curricula in all subject areas, tracks students’ progress toward goals, and consistently checks for understanding using a varied approach to meet the needs of all student groups.

### Impact
Across the vast majority of classrooms teachers consistently monitor achievement data, making curricular or instructional adjustments as needed. Students take ownership of their learning goals and demonstrate mastery toward those goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a variety of content specific cohesive assessments aligned to the curriculum, which include but are not limited to Students Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI) and Unique Learning Systems pre- and post-assessments, to provide individual teachers with student-specific information related to students’ achievement and progress. The school offers a unified grading system whereby all students receive one to four points as acknowledgement of their work products. Teachers use individualized instruction tracking forms to document student progress toward school goals. One teacher’s form indicated daily tracking of progress in operations, while another teacher’s form monitored successful teaching strategies that supported the student and included additional strategies to promote more progress.

- Teachers across the classes visited, and in teacher teams, explained how they make decisions regarding instructional learning groups based on baseline level data. Teachers monitor incremental gains with weekly student work products culled from common teacher-made assessments to inform revisions to their next planning steps and to effectively analyze students’ movement toward learning mastery. The vast majority of students demonstrate gains by moving one or more SANDI levels through the task-analyzed SMART goal.

- Teacher monitoring of student engagement and understanding is visibly active on the part of stakeholders including paraprofessionals. The teaching team can be seen either working with small groups with adapted materials or circulating to guide and intervene as needed. Students, on their own, through paraprofessionals and/or assistive learning technologies, shared they were learning. Students were observed using a self-assessing tool and identifying what they are able to do in the activity, such as pick up or hold a picture. Student Reflection cards monitor academic and personal behavior learning. Most teachers can be seen conferencing with students who need support in self-assessing with an adapted version of the reflection card. Many students could speak to their next learning steps. For example, one student interviewed at his work site at Montefiore explained that he is working on interviewing skills.
Teachers and teacher teams systematically collaborate to analyze a range of student data and information, and particularly for targeted students make connections to classroom practices. Additionally, the school has created a multi-tiered system of leadership structures to promote staff commitment through shared decision-making aligned to student achievement goals.

Impact
As a result, staff engages in an array of opportunities that afford them input into the direction that school goals based on student achievement take, thereby creating a cohesive culture of practices and shared improvements impacting student learning.

Supporting Evidence
- Teacher teams meet at least twice weekly and are grouped according to grade bands, academic content areas, and student populations. Teacher teams use student work samples and focus on the rigor of the tasks, how lessons are differentiated to include all learners and the level of questioning used by the teachers. Teachers stated that as a direct result of professional collaboration such as intervisitations, there is a strong coherent focus across the school on increasing reading and real-life skills.

- Teacher teams analyze a range of data and student work as standard practice. This is reflected in team minutes as well as being shared by designated lead teachers of each teacher team. Teachers can provide rationale for the team’s collective thinking around the instructional decisions being made as part of classroom planning and small-group instruction and how that applies to the adjustments each teacher is making given the particular students they teach. Subsequently, the coach follows up by supporting implementation of the agreed-upon strategy with each teacher individually. Logs from this classroom support are reviewed by the school’s instructional cabinet and serve as feedback that cycles back as additional data to inform future team meetings facilitated by the lead teachers.

- Staff articulate that the open invitation to participate on focused committees; the regular dissemination of formal surveys soliciting interests, ideas and needs; the constant informal exchanges and flow of ideas either face-to-face or by email; and the support by administration, teacher leaders and their peers in meeting a specific need as it arises or in piloting a fresh idea fosters a culture for learning whereby all stakeholders are vested in the policies and plans that are developed to impact the learning of the students they share. This results in teachers who are motivated in problem-solving new ways to engage students in applying academic skills to real life situations. For example, teachers have collaborated to create an online platform to provide resources across the sites based on students’ needs.