Quality Review Report

2019-2020

Evergreen Middle School for Urban Exploration
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 32K562
125 Covert Street
Brooklyn
NY 11207

Principal: Lauren Reiss

Dates of Review:
January 22, 2020 - January 23, 2020

Lead Reviewer: Debra Tasioudis
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

Evergreen Middle School for Urban Exploration serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to State 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 State standards and the 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 ongoing 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>
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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>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>
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### Systems for Improvement

<table>
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<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 schools instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate schoolwide 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 State standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

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

Findings
The school’s welcoming and inclusive culture is informed by the belief that children excel when they have strong relationships with adults at school. Structures for guidance and social-emotional learning for students are supported by professional learning and family outreach.

Impact
Students, caregivers and staff treat each other respectfully, and students adopt effective academic and personal habits, such as high levels of attendance, engagement and collaboration, and meaningfully exercise student voice in guiding school improvement efforts.

Supporting Evidence

- Students and caregivers overwhelmingly shared that the school is not just safe, it is welcoming. Several students shared that their anxiety about attending middle school immediately dissipated as students and staff welcomed them. One sixth-grader noted, “I transferred here midyear. I was expecting to feel alone and not be a part of things, but I was immediately greeted warmly by eighth graders.” Others shared that the principal and teachers are always present in the morning to welcome them, and in classes and afterschool, everyone, including school safety agents, is welcoming and supportive. All students shared that they had several adults who know them well, including teachers of clubs that meet on Fridays, afterschool, before school and at lunch, where students and adults share in their interests, such as gaming, music, robotics, Zumba, and drama. These clubs allow students and adults to develop stronger relationships and keep students motivated to attend school, as seen in the school’s 97 percent attendance rate at the time of the review.

- Caregivers also noted that students are treated lovingly by staff and peers, and referred to school as, “a home away from home.” Parents appreciate that the school leaders and staff share their cell phone numbers, and know every student and every parent well. One parent shared that their child is assisted by a paraprofessional, and expressed gratitude for their close relationship, and work together to build the child’s self-confidence, something that has flourished at school and at home. For parents, there are also workshops and support groups for bereavement, trauma response, and social media. As one teacher shared, “We enjoy a positive relationship with the administrators and with one another. There is no fearfulness here.” Another teacher shared, “As a new teacher, I can always go to administrators and other teachers and ask for support or guidance. We all look out for each other.” Teachers, especially the eleven that are new to the school, are provided with professional learning to support restorative practices and culturally responsive teaching practices.

- The school has a curriculum to teach students about the school’s core values of professionalism, respect for community, educational urgency, and perseverance. The school year opens with ten lessons on the core values, and they are reinforced in classroom lessons throughout the year. Students receive *Everbucks* for demonstrating these behaviors, and students go weekly to the school *Everstore* to redeem the school currency for rewards. In previous years, the school store was run by adults, and had only basic school supplies. The store is now run by students, and now include games, gift cards, and items ordered by students for students. Since the switch, there has been a marked increase in students accruing *Everbucks* and number of students visiting the store each week, demonstrating student voice in guiding school improvement efforts. The dean and social-emotional learning team also track student and class data connected to student behavior, driving professional learning sessions for the whole staff, as well as individualized professional learning for teachers who need more support, as demonstrated by low or abnormally high provision of *Everbucks*.
Area of Focus

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

Teachers use assessments and rubrics that align with the school’s curricula and, in reading and math, enable teachers to determine student progress toward goals. The use of portfolios is beginning to create a clear portrait of student mastery.

Impact

Feedback to students does not often move from actionable to meaningful. Beyond reading levels, data from assessments is not yet tracked in a way that allows all students, including students with disabilities and Multilingual Learners (MLLs), to demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- In a meeting with students, almost all brought work to share that was graded and included feedback and next steps from the teacher, most of them with a rubric. One student shared a math performance task that included a rubric, and a grade of 80 percent. The student shared that they did well on using the algorithm for dividing the decimal and was provided with a next step to, "Remember that the written response should explain each of our calculations, and thought procedures for problem solving." While the student did not go back to correct their work, they did complete a self-reflection, describing the importance of including written responses explaining their work. Although students had feedback and next steps, none shared that they were able to go back and apply the next step, or were able to talk about how next steps provided to them on individual assignments applied to them more broadly as learners.

- In student portfolios, in classrooms and those shared by students in a meeting, some included trackers of completed student work; others included the trackers, but they were blank. Some portfolios included student self-reflections at end of unit that demonstrated a clear portrait of student mastery; others did not.

- In lesson plans, there was often evidence of the use of leveled reading assessments or online reading and math exams administrated across the grades, and used to create student groups and to differentiate tasks or texts for groups of students. In an English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plan on analyzing a text for the use of foreshadowing, all students read a shared text, but students were grouped according to their most recent online reading assessment. In math units and pacing calendars shared, there was a reorganization of units across the grades, in response to an online assessment given across the grades to ensure that students have more practice in creating constructed responses in math, as well as more scaffolds to support their writing in math. In other subject areas, teachers create unit reflections based on a review of end-of-unit performance assessments that guide revisions to units, including the order of lessons and the resources and supports offered to students.

- In meetings with teachers and school leaders, as well as in student progress trackers shared, it was noted that teachers are using common assessments across the grades and subjects to determine individual and class progress toward goals. Data from the online assessments and performance tasks were shared for each subject area. The school also uses a performance tracker for all students, to which teachers across the grades have access, that supports teachers in understanding student progress across the subject areas, not just in their own classes. There are also pre- and post-writing unit trackers that enable teachers to see the development of student writing across the units. However, there is not yet evidence of tracking progress across the grades and subjects for subgroups, so that all learners, including students with disabilities and MLLs demonstrate increased mastery.
### Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:**  
1.1 Curriculum

**Rating:** Well Developed

### Findings

School leaders and staff ensure that curricula are aligned to the State standards, are culturally responsive, and includes standards-based learning targets. There is an embedded focus on higher-order thinking skills through academic and content vocabulary acquisition, and literacy skills.

### Impact

The curricula and academic tasks are coherent and accessible so that all learners must demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- In student work shared in small group, math work demonstrates a focus on constructive responses in word problems. Eighth-grade math performance tasks shared ask students to create and solve equations with variables and demonstrate thinking in writing and math sentences. Students also engage in real-life scenarios, such as math problems that ask students to make decisions about purchasing clothing, and selecting the store with best prices. In ELA, students engage in culturally-relevant tasks, such as an informative essay shared on gentrification, in which students researched gentrification nationally and in Brooklyn. In a seventh-grade task shared, students created reading responses and annotated non-fiction texts on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), debating the efficacy of supports for student immigrants. Also, throughout the units shared, there was evidence of strategic use of culturally-relevant texts and real-world scenarios in State-standard aligned tasks.

- Lesson plans include purposeful focus on State-standards based, student-friendly learning targets. Lesson plans from across the grades and subjects also include opening activities that engage students in discussions or written tasks that focus students on pulling out academic and content language from the standards and defining terms in vocabulary trackers that students carry from class to class and engage in these tasks at the opening of every lesson. An ELA lesson plan includes a purposeful focus on academic and content vocabulary, common in lesson plans shared across the subject areas. In another literacy lesson plan, there are two standards of focus, one on writing and introducing a claim with precision; another focusing on speaking, listening and collaboration. An Algebra lesson plan demonstrates alignment not only to eighth-grade standards for problem solving, but also to high school level State standards for creating equations that describe numbers or relationships. This attention to high school level Algebra and high school State standards is purposefully built into not only the eighth-grade units, but also into all of the math curricula to ensure students are well prepared to take Regents exam in the eighth grade.

- In lesson plans and units, teachers include higher-order thinking questions for discussions and written tasks. Tasks in lesson plans and units are detailed, and include suggested modifications, vocabulary supports for all learners. In a writing lesson plan, there is purposeful vocabulary instruction planned to ensure that students understand terms, such as counterclaim and rebuttal, as well as higher-order thinking questions, such as, “Why is it important to know what counterclaims and rebuttals someone might throw at you and your claim?” Across the grades and subjects, teacher teams create unit reflections, such as one shared for a sixth-grade unit on autobiographies, in which teachers make revisions, such as additional skills to explicitly teach, additional strategies to support student understanding, including annotation and written reflections to ensure that students have ample opportunity to practice rigorous skills, such as questioning the text.
Additional Finding

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

Across classrooms, teachers provide scaffolds and models while using the gradual release model, so that students make their thinking visible in work products and discussions.

Impact

Teaching practices and routines shared across content teams help students to work with independence, collaborate with peers, and engage in discussions. Students produce work products that demonstrate high levels of thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classes, teaching practices adhere to the shared belief that students learn best through use of the gradual release model. In this instructional model, teachers demonstrate something or share an authentic model text with students and make their thinking visible. Teachers then invite students to repeat the process together with the teacher or group of peers, and then students practice independently, or with a partner. This was observed in many classes, including a dual-language science class where the teacher modeled observing and noting the relationship between molecules, temperature and movement before students were sent off in small groups to practice with peers. The gradual release model was also observed in a math class where students analyzed patterns in real-world scenarios to see if a linear function exists. The teacher provided a model for students, and then the teacher and students worked together to solve another set, with the teacher modeling not only their mathematical thinking, but also mistake making and perseverance in math before sending students off to work independently.

- In classrooms, there were lots of scaffolds and supports for students, including access to thinking of peers, vocabulary instruction and support, use of technology, teacher models, anchor charts. Lessons often begin with purposeful attention to academic and content vocabulary, to support all learners, including MLLs and students with disabilities. Teachers provide definitions and opportunities for students to practice using vocabulary, as in a math lesson where the teacher provided definitions of math terms in the learning target, and asked students to use the terms in a whole-group discussion. Also, in discussions in many classrooms, students used sentence or question stems provided on charts or on their desks to engage in discussions with the whole class, or at their tables, as observed in an ELA class. These sentence stems and questions served to support students with disabilities and MLLs across classes. Students also used strategies for reading and responding to non-fiction texts across the subject areas, such as annotating the text, observed in use in ELA, science and social studies classrooms. In many classrooms, teachers provided models, and used videos to guide student thinking about reading strategies or science concepts. While there were few extensions offered to challenge high-performing students, scaffolds and supports were in use to provide students with access to challenging tasks.

- Student work and class discussions demonstrated high levels of student thinking and participation. In a science class, students examined two models of molecular movement and discussed their thinking with a peer. In a math class, students worked together in groups to solve problems that students created themselves to prepare for a fictitious trip to a waterpark. Here, students demonstrated high levels of thinking in their discussions and work products, explaining their thinking to peers and creating and solving complex problems. In an ELA class, students worked independently to research topics, such as racism, teen use of social media, and mass shootings, taking notes from online sources. Students were then prompted to share their topics and discuss the validity of their sources with a peer thus, demonstrating high levels of thinking.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate clear expectations to staff regarding professionalism, instruction, communication, and professional learning. School staff ensure consistent communication with caregivers through means, such as an open-door policy and an online grade system and logs.

Impact

Teacher-led professional learning, support from school leaders and external coaches result in a culture of mutual accountability. Parents feel well supported by staff that partner with them to ensure that students make progress toward high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of the year, school leaders and staff collaboratively developed the school’s instructional focus on student engagement and discussion. The staff also work together to develop look fors within each subject area, including discussion protocols, vocabulary supports and authentic task development. Throughout the year, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), comprised of teacher leaders and administrators monitor progress and adherence to the instructional expectations through classroom walkthroughs and oversight of content- and grade-level teams. The ILT meets weekly, shares observed trends and patterns, adjusts professional learning, and provides individual teachers and teams with feedback, creating a culture of mutual accountability for the school’s instructional focus.

- Professional learning offered by teacher leaders, administrators and external coaches supports teachers in achieving expectations set for other professional expectations, such as lesson planning, use of gradual release model, and the development of student-friendly, standards-based learning targets. In a meeting with teachers, one shared, “As a new teacher, the professional learning around how to connect the learning targets to the standards has really supported me. Now, I unpack the learning targets with students, and I’ve gotten better at it because of the practice I’ve had with colleagues in the sessions.” Another teacher shared that there is mutual accountability among the staff for vocabulary instruction through the vocabulary trackers that students use in each class for the opening of the lesson. Students use the same tracker from class to class, and it enables students and teachers to see the academic and content vocabulary taught in each class, and enables teachers to support students’ vocabulary development across the subject areas. On Monday afternoons, the ILT shares what they have seen across classes, teachers review learning targets and vocabulary taught, and break out into small groups to adjust units, holding each other mutually accountable for the refinement of the curricula. Teachers also conduct intervisitations, around the instructional look fors and positive behavior supports for students. Afterwards, teachers debrief together, discuss what is working and what is not, and make adjustments to instructional practices, based on feedback from peers.

- Parents praised the school’s open classrooms and constant updates about student progress throughout the day, using the online grading platform and frequent progress reports. Parents also appreciate that grades and narratives of student progress are updated every Friday, which enables caregivers to have informed discussions about progress and needed supports with their children, and with teachers every week. Parents appreciate that there is time for parent engagement on Tuesdays as well, and appreciate the workshops offered that help them understand the curricula and assessments. As one parent shared, “Before exams, teachers give you a bank of similar test questions so you can practice with your child at home.” Through this constant two-way communication, teachers successfully partner with families to support student progress.
### 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

Teacher teams consistently engage in inquiry that promotes school goals, particularly, improving vocabulary instruction and promoting social-emotional learning for students. There are distributed leadership structures in place.

#### Impact

Grade and content teams promote the achievement of school goals for improving ELA and math performance and social-emotional learning outcomes. Teacher leaders across the grades and subjects ensure that teachers have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning.

#### Supporting Evidence

- **During the review, the schoolwide ELA team was observed engaging in an inquiry around student progress in synthesizing information in reading responses, aligned with the school's goal to increase the percentage of students at proficiency on the State ELA exams by 5%. Teachers from across the grades reviewed student work shared by the presenting sixth-grade teacher. The teacher opened with a presentation of student strengths and needs within the argumentative writing unit and focused the teachers around the question, “How do we get students to pick information from non-fiction texts that is important and relevant to a stated claim? Teachers took a few minutes to review the State standards and goals for the unit, before examining student work. Teachers then reviewed student work independently, taking notes, and then engaged in a round of warm and cool feedback, before offering next instructional steps to the teacher, and reflecting on changes they have made in the past that were successful for students and pondering possible next instructional steps for their own students. The presenting teacher walked away with a new strategy for assisting students in breaking apart into smaller sections as they read, identifying the main idea and subtopics for each section, so that they could do the same in their own writing. This work, a clear demonstration of inquiry into improving instruction and strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers, aligns to the school's goals.**

- **In a separate question and answer session with teachers, teachers confirmed that the work of other content teams takes a similar approach, with teachers presenting problems of practice grounded in student work with an eye toward revising curricular and instructional practices. On the math team, teachers in the department bring end-of-unit performance tasks that they are developing to better align the units across the grades to prepare students for taking the Algebra Regents exam in eighth grade, an exam offered to all students. On this team, teachers present the tasks they are developing, get feedback from the teachers from across the grades who are a part of the team. Discussions about alignment across the grades and horizontal alignment across classes was also evident in the team’s notes, demonstrating an inquiry process into the team’s curricular and assessment practices.**

- **In addition to leading the grade and content teams, there are many opportunities for teachers to have a voice in key decisions that impact student learning. The veteran teachers lead the social-emotional learning team that guides the school’s Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS), including development of classroom lessons on positive behavior, engagement and collaboration with peers. Teachers also lead the development of the school’s eleven new teachers in areas, such as lesson planning, implementation of the gradual release model, and classroom management. The two model teachers also use their classrooms as labs where their colleagues visit and learn, and provide coaching support to build shared knowledge among all teachers.**