Quality Review Report

2019-2020

The Academy of Talented Scholars
Elementary 20K682
50 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204

Principal: Josephine Sportella-Giusto

Dates of Review:
November 20, 2019 - November 21, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Michele Ashley
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

The Academy of Talented Scholars serves students in grade K through grade 5. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></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>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</table>
### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<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...**

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<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>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 schoolwide 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 State standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The school’s approach to culture building is informed by the schoolwide agreements and core beliefs regarding inclusion. School community members strategically align professional learning (PL), parent outreach, and student enrichment opportunities.

Impact

A clear theory of action supports progress toward school goals, and meaningfully involves students in decisions regarding school improvement efforts. Schoolwide social-emotional structures, such as enrichment clusters, support the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors by all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The Academy of Talented Scholars (TAOTS) theory of action is guided by the Tribes step-by-step process to achieve specific learning goals. There are six Tribes Agreements, which include: attentive listening, safety with body and heart, appreciations/no put downs, mutual respect, personal best, and right to pass/right to participate. These agreements align to the Tribes mission statement that states, “The mission of Tribes is to assure the healthy and whole development of every child so that each has the knowledge, skill, and resiliency to be successful in a rapidly changing world. The Tribes agreements are evident throughout all aspects of the learning community, and support the school goal to reach schoolwide implementation of the Tribes program by June 2020. A core belief in schoolwide inclusion is shared by all staff and supports TAOTS as an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Nest school. There is an ASD Nest and general education Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class on every grade.

- Students are meaningfully involved in decisions made within classrooms, as well as regarding enrichment activities and schoolwide improvement efforts. There is a student council that includes student leaders from grades three to five. During the November 20, 2019 student council meeting, students followed a preset agenda, held the roles of facilitator, note taker, and timekeeper and used a brainstorming protocol to develop ideas for this year’s student council project. Students act as peer mediators for students across the grades and have initiated changes to the school uniform, schoolwide recycling, and homework policies. Based on student input, students have the option to be out of uniform on Fridays, have started a school green team, and reduced the hours that are required to be spent on homework during school breaks.

- Three teachers attended training and have been certified as trainers to provide PL in Tribes communities for all staff. Teachers facilitate lessons on the Tribes agreements and lead students through a variety of social-emotional activities designed to enhance students’ understanding of the Tribes values. Book of the month lessons align to the agreements, and texts are selected to reflect the cultures of the students. Monthly texts tell stories of newcomers to America, focus on Hispanic, Black, and Asian characters, and promote kindness and anti-bullying. Families are invited to family events and workshops, such as the Tribes Family Mixer, to help families reinforce and use the six agreements in the home. School leaders and staff note that the Tribes program has led to students demonstrating reduced impulsivity, increased focus and self-regulation, and the removal of the need for at-risk paraprofessional support, creating a less restrictive environment.
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 consistently use questioning and student observation to check for understanding, and use a variety of common formative and summative assessments to monitor student progress. However, monitoring does not create a clear picture of student progress for all students across contents.

Impact

Assessment practices and student self-assessment support effective adjustments that meet student’s learning needs, but have not led to increased mastery for all students. Although students in some content areas are becoming aware of their next learning steps, this is not consistent across contents.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use running records, spelling inventories, beginning- and end-of-year benchmark assessments, and a variety of other grade-specific skill-based assessments to monitor reading progress for students across the grades. These assessments are scheduled and recorded on the P.S. 682 Assessment Calendar, which lists the types of assessments and their administration dates. Reading and writing benchmark data are used to identify student performance levels. Teachers use the performance levels to identify students for academic intervention and small group instruction. First-grade plans include the use of independent reading level data to assign individual students to red, orange, green, or blue color-coded groups to receive differentiated instruction.

- A collaborative inquiry group used students’ writing samples from kindergarten through grade five, including students with disabilities, students performing in the lowest third, and English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELLs/MLLs) to identify target reading and writing skills and strategies. Teacher notes highlight that students were reading and writing at a literal level and lacked command of oral and written language. Notes include plans for additional lessons, scaffolds, and supports to build student comprehension skills. The level of progress monitoring in reading and writing enables teachers to track progress and make instructional decisions for all students across the grades. However, current assessment practices do not create a clear picture of student progress across the content areas, hindering opportunities for increased mastery.

- Teachers ask content-specific questions during instruction. A fourth-grade teacher asked students about their strategy for selecting a reading topic for their group project. One group shared that they were making selections based on their skill focus. The teacher then complimented the group and shared that strategy with the class. Several other groups then adopted that strategy to help them select their topics. One student noted, “That’s smart, I focused on predicting before so I’m going to focus on predicting again, it will be easier to compare and contrast.” Across classrooms, teacher questioning and assessments lead to adjustments by teachers and students.

- Teachers provide opportunities for students to assess their own performance and provide feedback to their classmates. For example, a second-grade writing checklist asks students, “Did I do it like a second-grader?” On this checklist, students answer either not yet, starting to, or yes in response to the statements: “I used my senses to add descriptions to my writing,” and “I checked my work for errors.” Students also have the opportunity to receive feedback from a classmate in the form of a compliment and next step. Teachers provide students with verbal next steps during small group and individual conferences, and share next steps with students in turnkey notes to colleagues. In one example, notes indicate that a student needs movement breaks, one-on-one reteaching, and language frames. Although teachers share next steps for learning with students and colleagues, students are not always aware of their next learning steps.
Findings
School leaders and faculty strategically select curricula to ensure alignment to State standards. Curricula and tasks ask students to make observations, explain, and analyze across grades.

Impact
Alignment to State standards supports coherence across the curricula. Learning tasks require all learners, including ELLs/MLLs, and students with disabilities, to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty have purposefully selected curricula aligned to State standards in English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, and social studies. The curriculum is intentionally consistent in each content area to support coherence as students move across the grades. Lesson plans across the grades include essential questions and learning objectives strategically aligned to content standards. For example, a grade-five math lesson plan includes the essential question, “How can we use the relationships between numbers and their factors to develop strategies for solving multiplication and division problems with multi-digit numbers?” This lesson also includes the learning objective, “Mathematicians will describe and compare strategies used to solve multiplication problems by explaining and listening to each other’s strategies.” This lesson also identifies the aligned content and math practice strategies. Lesson plans across contents follow a similar structure, supporting coherence and promoting college and career readiness for all students.

- Faculty meets vertically to align curricula during Monday planning meetings to ensure they are aligned to State standards. Each year, faculty and school leaders focus on a particular content area based on student performance. During the 2018-2019 school year, faculty focused on math and shifted to a new curriculum across the grades to be more aligned to State standards. This year, faculty is focused on analyzing the impact of the writing curriculum, forming an inquiry group that will use student-work samples and performance data across the grades to evaluate curricular coherence. Consistent review of curricula within content areas and across grades supports schoolwide coherence.

- Lessons across contents ask students, including ELLs/MLLs and students with disabilities, to use strategic thinking via prompts and questions aligned to Webb’s Depth of Knowledge level three. For example, a grade-four lesson on weather asks students to think across topics to compare what they already know, and analyze how a second example is similar or different. A kindergarten math lesson asks students to compare two-dimensional shapes by describing their attributes. A grade-three writing lesson asks students to identify the main points of the informational writing and explain/teach them to a partner. Lessons include content specific vocabulary, prompts, charts, and organizers, as well as a variety of product types embedded in the plan to support all learners in demonstrating their thinking.
**Finding**

Teaching practices across the vast majority of classrooms align to the workshop model and a belief that children learn best when the whole child is nurtured. Teachers strategically provide multiple entry points and supports for students using visuals, prompts, and manipulatives.

**Impact**

Teacher-team discussions and PL inform pedagogy that consistently engages students in discussions to enhance their learning. The high quality supports and extensions engage all learners in appropriately challenging tasks so that all are able to demonstrate higher-order skills in their work products.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Faculty and school leaders agree that students learn best by using a workshop model of teaching that supports a variety of student learning styles. Teachers use a workshop model across contents that includes a mini-lesson, active engagement, and independent practice. Teachers present lessons using a variety of media to facilitate learning for students of all learning styles, including the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learner. In visited classrooms, teachers presented mini-lessons using books, videos, modeling, and role play. For example, in a third-grade class, the teachers did a role play to show students how to teach their informational text to a partner. In this class, students listened as one teacher taught the other about her informational topic. One teacher carefully modeled what they would teach first and next, and the other teacher modeled notetaking and providing thoughtful feedback. Teaching practices schoolwide engage students and are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- Faculty and school leaders consistently engage in discussions regarding teaching practices via a variety of team and school level meetings. These include grade-level planning, teacher-leader, Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), vertical planning, and child study meetings. During these meetings, participants collect both academic and social-emotional data to create a whole picture of what might impact a student's performance. For example, fourth-grade and kindergarten inquiry notes include discussions of individual student strengths, areas for improvement, noticings, and next steps. Next steps identified for a fourth-grade student included the use of a timer to keep on track, and noticings for a kindergarten student included the need for picture prompts to guide, stop, and think about a story. Shared beliefs about how students learn best support frequent instructional discussions at the team and school levels.

- High quality scaffolds, supports, and extensions are evident across classrooms. Teachers provide consistent small-group instruction based on student performance levels. During a lesson on weather, ELLs/MLLs participated in a small group lesson to review key vocabulary using picture prompts that illustrated the four seasons and their corresponding elements. Students were able to use the vocabulary words and sentence starters to create stories about the weather. In a fourth-grade class, students had individual notepads with notes and prompts from previous lessons. One student's notebook included “Phrases to use when comparing and contrasting information.” Another student's notebook included “Prompts to help us think about how characters change.” In this class, students used the notes to support their work. Across math classrooms, math vocabulary charts include visuals and examples for students. A grade-five math classroom included individual charts for students with prompts, such as “Things mathematicians say to each other”, to support accountable talk during math conversations. Multiple entry points across contents engage all students in appropriately challenging tasks, enabling them to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work products.
**Additional Finding**

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<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 provide training and consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff via PL, staff handbooks, and grade-leader meetings. School leaders and staff effectively collaborate with families via progress reports, letters, phone, email, and face-to-face meetings.

### Impact

School leaders and staff hold each other mutually accountable for shared learning expectations. Parents partner with teachers and staff to support their child’s progress by incorporating teacher recommendations and Tribes practices in the home.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders begin each year with an all staff training that outlines expectations for teaching and learning. This year’s PL included sessions to introduce new staff to the Tribes process, as well as sessions to deepen understanding of the Tribes process for returning staff. PL also included sessions on Advance observations, curriculum and assessment expectations, and utilizing student data to revise and align curriculum and instruction. Faculty also receives consistent training and support in understanding the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the use of a two-teacher model via weekly PL sessions, post- and peer-observation feedback. Clear and shared expectations support mutual accountability among teachers, staff, and school leaders.

- School leaders outline yearly expectations in a TAOTS Staff Handbook that is distributed at the beginning of each year. The handbook not only outlines expectations for teacher planning and preparation, but also clarifies expectations for communication in a section entitled, “Principal to Staff Communication.” This section reviews expectations for email communication, mailboxes, shared drives and document access, face-to-face meetings, and weekly and daily updates. The handbook highlights the importance of proper daily planning, noting, “Lesson plans must reflect the learning objective, small group instruction for each lesson, as well as follow-up assignments and differentiation for each lesson.” Across the grades, grade leaders and teachers hold themselves accountable to shared expectations for planning and preparation.

- The TAOTS Staff Handbook also outlines clear expectations for parent communication, identifying weekly parent communication times and expectations for parent outreach and responses to parent communication. Parent letters outline academic and enrichment activities and any new schoolwide initiatives. Progress reports are provided to all parents between marking periods that include reading, writing, and math performance levels, attendance, personal and social growth, narrative teacher feedback, and next steps for learning. Families shared that the progress reports and teacher communications keep them informed about their child’s progress and needs.

- Caregivers also shared that teachers and staff are in constant communication via phone, email, or face-to-face meetings at dismissal, noting that teachers respond to any issues promptly. Caregivers frequently receive information on their child’s progress with suggestions for activities to support their children at home. One parent shared that she worked closely with a teacher to help her child improve in social studies after transferring to TAOTS from another school. Caregivers also shared that they have incorporated Tribes agreements into their family practices, as the language is “emotionally supportive.” School leaders and staff have successfully partnered with parents to support students’ academic and emotional development.
## Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry and professional collaboration on grade-level teams that strengthen teachers’ use of instructional protocols. Distributed leadership structures are evident in grade-level and Instructional Leadership Teams.

## Impact

Professional collaboration promotes the implementation of State standards and supports schoolwide coherence and increased achievement for all learners. Teachers play an integral role in curricular and extracurricular decisions that impact student learning.

## Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are engaged in inquiry on grade-level and vertical inquiry teams and follow collaboratively developed Guidelines for Effective Inquiry Teams. These guidelines inform the work of all inquiry teams and support schoolwide instructional coherence. Guidelines address team norms, roles, and responsibilities, and require teams to place all information in a grade specific shared drive. A review of team notes revealed that teams use grade-level student data to identify common strengths and struggles, select inquiry students, and develop scaffolds and supports that will address student needs. Inquiry notes include noticings before and after intervention strategies are applied. For example, fourth-grade notes on writing include the need to create sentence stems, build on existing routines, and identify target terms to be used across curricula, such as prefer, convince, according to, statistics, incident, and fact. Across the grades, teachers shared that their work on inquiry teams has strengthened their capacity to use student and teacher data to revise instruction.

- School leaders shared that teamwork has enhanced teachers' leadership capacity, accountability for student achievement, and ownership of school improvement efforts. Leaders highlighted teachers’ willingness to collaborate and take instructional risks with new ideas and strategies. Teachers shared that they have become more facile with inquiry protocols, and use them to move their work forward. During a fourth-grade inquiry team meeting, teachers seamlessly used a collaborative assessment protocol to review student performance on a writing task. Teachers used the protocol to ask clarifying and probing questions and identify targeted next steps for ELLs/MLLs and students performing at the lowest third. Identified next steps included partner support, opportunities to think aloud, and a review of high utility words. The use of protocols and team collaboration build coherence and supports increased achievement for all students. Last year, inquiry teams focused their efforts on math instruction, supporting an increase in student State math performance from 65 percent achieving Levels 3 and 4 in 2018 to 74 percent in 2019.

- Teacher leadership opportunities are embedded in a variety of leadership teams, including school leadership, grade leader, and child study teams, grade-level and vertical inquiry teams, the Measures of Student Learning committee, professional development committee, and the Instructional Leadership Team. These teams and committees offer teachers an integral role in decisions regarding PL, curriculum selection, development, and revision, as well as enrichment, intervention, and support. During the 2018-2019 school year, teachers and school leaders conducted an in-depth analysis of student math performance and decided to shift the math curriculum and implement supplemental small-group math instruction to support students in meeting grade-level standards. This year, inquiry teams are focused on writing, conducting inquiry, and developing strategies to support student improvement in constructed responses, writing from sources, and elaboration.