Quality Review Report

2019-2020

M.S. 131
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 02M131
100 Hester Street
Manhattan
NY 10002

Principal: Benjamin Geballe

Dates of Review:
March 4, 2020 - March 5, 2020

Lead Reviewer: Kevin Bradley
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

M.S. 131 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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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<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 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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<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
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<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Rating</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<th>Systems for Improvement</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td>Area</td>
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<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>
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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>Area of Celebration</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>
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Area of Celebration

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

Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are embedded so that there is effective teacher leadership, as lead teachers play an integral role in key decisions.

Impact

Teacher instructional capacity has strengthened, resulting in increased student achievement. Teachers play an integral role in focusing on the instructional goal of fostering student-led discussion to support learning.

Supporting Evidence

- A triad inquiry team, consisting of three teachers across grades and content areas, met to discuss their goal of using collaborative intervisitation to increase student discussion. The presenting teacher shared her problem of practice, about a group of nine students out of sixteen who have not yet connected to her focus on student-led discussion. The presenting teacher’s wonderings were that when students spoke less, the quality of their responses improved, based on the discussion rubric, and included reasons, evidence, and explanation. One of the intervisitation observers also saw improvement in the quality of discussion but noted a need for students to elaborate. He suggested they have the rubric next to them during discussion. The third member of the triad observed that students know how the discussion should flow and felt the use of data from previous lessons to inform upcoming lessons was a strength of the observed teacher. The team proceeded with clarifying questions and glows and grows, including an opportunity for reflection by the presenting teacher on the work of the team. The identified next steps for the teacher were to conference with students one-on-one about discussion, assess if participation in class discussion correlates with student performance on their essays, and consider the issues of quantity versus quality, including the level of student engagement, regarding discussions.

- Grade level meetings, called community circles, occur weekly, with all teachers on each grade level team involved as they discuss student needs. Department meetings are held weekly, and special education teachers rotate weeks between content departments and their own meeting. Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) teams have two common periods per week built into the schedule for planning lessons, reviewing student work, norming practice, and sharing strategies. Teams modify curricula to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment, norm practice with student work, and examine data. Teacher team meetings have strengthened teacher instructional capacity. A teacher reported, “We got to choose the triad group with a focus on learning from our colleagues. We shared from our last meeting, she applied it to her lesson, and we saw growth. We teach the same thing, we share a lot of materials, and for us it’s really significant.” Thus, team meetings have resulted in increased student achievement, as State English Language Arts (ELA) scores improved six percent and State math scores improved 3 percent, from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019.

- Distributed leadership is exemplified by the work of lead teachers from each department and grade level, with two of these teachers also serving as ELA and math coaches. Teacher leaders affect student learning by leading cycles of intervisitation and inquiry while creating a structure for professional development (PD) focused on the school’s instructional goals. Teachers collaborate on best instructional practices during department meetings, inquiry teams, and grade meetings. The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), including leaders of each department, each grade level, coaches, and administration, makes instructional decisions by looking at data, setting and evaluating goals, and deciding on PD plans. During each team meeting, teacher leaders follow protocols for collaborative decision-making, looking at student work and data analysis.
Area of Focus

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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

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics aligned with the school’s curricula, including a student discussion rubric. School leaders and teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

While teachers provide students with actionable feedback regarding student achievement, these practices were not evident across a vast majority of classrooms. Assessment data are used to adjust curricula and instruction, but there is not yet evidence that tracking progress is leading to increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, samples of student work products showed teacher-written actionable feedback directing students to the steps they should take to strengthen their work. Actionable feedback, written on post-it notes and assignments, is present in different grades and subjects. Feedback from an eighth-grade math assignment includes, “Try to use more math vocabulary words. Read all questions carefully. Write detailed/complete answers.” An example from a seventh-grade art assignment includes, “Remember your final drawing must include the following: Objects combined, piece subtracted from object, objects traveling in multiple directions, holes in objects.” The written art feedback includes checkmarks next to the first two items and circles next to the last two to indicate what was missing. Teachers also give feedback on student goal-setting sheets. While actionable feedback is apparent across classrooms in displayed student work, some of the student work products shared at the meeting with students did not contain actionable feedback, illustrating that this practice was not yet in place across a vast majority of classrooms.

- Teachers use rubrics to rate student work and to provide students with clear expectations of what needs to be included in assignments. Schoolwide use of a student discussion rubric was evident, as was the consistent use of the writing rubric from State ELA exams across grades six through eight. Some teachers include glows and grows or areas of celebration and improvement on slips of paper attached to rubrics. Additionally, teachers use rubrics as checklists. Students spoke about how they used rubrics to improve the quality of their work. Grading policies are consistent within individual departments, with grades divided into two broad categories, academic standards and learning habits. However, grading policies are not standardized across the entire school. As a result, assessment practices do not yet offer a clear portrait of student mastery.

- Common assessments are used to determine student progress and eligibility for schoolwide support and interventions. Teachers use item analysis of skills from State assessments, baseline assessments, benchmark assessments, and performance tasks to address student learning targets. Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) tests, Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments, and student-led discussions are also tracked as common assessments across the school. Individual departments track content-specific skills, too. For example, ELA teachers use reading and writing trackers and social studies teachers track accountable talk. The school’s instructional focus on student-led discussion has shown gains from the beginning of the year. Students are nearly twice as likely to ask questions and/or offer contrasting positions during discussions, as compared with the discussion baseline in October. Common assessments results are used for ongoing curricular modifications across content areas, such as the redesign of math curricula. However, the use of common assessments has not resulted in all students currently demonstrating increased mastery. Indeed, while there has been some growth on assessments, English Language Learners (ELLs), in particular, have not shown increased mastery.
Additional Finding

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

Curricula are strategically aligned to State standards. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are coherently embedded in academic tasks through use of learning protocols across grades and subjects.

Impact

Curricular alignment to State standards results in coherence across grades and subject areas, promoting college and career readiness for all learners. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills require that all students demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers produce curricular documents across content areas that are strategically aligned to State standards. Lesson plans, unit plans, and curriculum maps reflect full integration of State standards embedded across content areas. For example, lesson plans in ELA emphasize writing from sources to support a claim. For instance, a seventh-grade social studies lesson plan has students preparing for a debate by writing a counter argument and rebuttal paragraph. The use of a fishbowl discussion for essay preparation is found in an eighth-grade ELA lesson plan. Coherence across content areas is evident in curricula documents, showing the use of statewide protocols to support student learning, which are consistent across grades and subjects. Learning environment protocols, such as ready to learn, SLANT (Sit Up Straight, Lean in and Listen, Ask and Answer Questions, Nod in Agreement, Track the Speaker), and voice levels, help teachers norm expectations for student engagement, while the TAG protocol (Tell them something you like, Ask a question about the work, Give a suggestion for improvement) standardizes peer feedback. Text coding and close reading protocols are designed to help students in all subject areas tackle rigorous texts.

- A review of curricular documents reveals academic tasks that emphasize higher order skills for all students. Lesson plans include modifications for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), such as the use of graphic organizers. Lesson plans involving ELLs include the use of translations, previewing key vocabulary words and definitions, and visuals so that ELLs are able to demonstrate their thinking following the same high-level standards expected of all students. Rigorous habits are embedded in a coherent way across content areas, including in a redesigned vertical math curriculum, starting in sixth grade and continuing through to the eighth grade, to support the increase in the number of students taking the Algebra I Regents exam.

- Lesson plans consistently challenge students to utilize rigorous habits in the course of instruction. Learning target statements in lesson plans include, from an eighth-grade ELA lesson plan, “I will revise my introduction paragraph in order to evaluate my opinions and develop my craft as a writer,” and, from a seventh-grade social studies lesson plan, “I will present my biographical narrative in order to demonstrate my interviewing and writing skills which display my ability to form human connections.” Additionally, students are regularly writing and supporting their work using evidence from the text. Lesson plans consistently detail high-level questions. Examples of such questions found in curricular documents include, from a sixth-grade science curriculum map, “What could be causing ice to melt and temperatures to increase on Earth?”, from a seventh-grade social studies curriculum map, “How do issues of power, wealth, and morality influence growth?”, and, from an eighth-grade ELA curriculum map, “Has the author or speaker used sufficient relevant evidence and sound reasoning to support his or her claim?” As a result, curricula are designed so that all learners must demonstrate their thinking.
Additional Finding

### Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy

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**Findings**

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs that students learn best when engaged in discussions. Students are engaged in collaborative learning activities, including paired and group discussions, debates, and student-led learning.

**Impact**

While most students produce meaningful work products that reflect high levels of student thinking and participation, discussions in the vast majority of classrooms did not always demonstrate these levels.

**Supporting Evidence**

- During an eighth-grade science lesson about genetics, students worked in groups and discussed their work as they used rubrics and argumentation sentence starters and worked on a self-reflection tracker. Students went up to board and shared their findings with peers. During a seventh-grade ELA ICT lesson about the effect of screen time on the adolescent brain, one group took the position that screen time should be limited while another group took the opposing position. Students filled out a self-tracker for the discussion, which they use to align their work according to the discussion rubric. Students stood as they presented their positions to the class, and there was a counter-argument phase of the discussion. During a seventh-grade dual language American history class, students found their groups listed on the board when they entered the room and sat in them, silently writing the learning target. The teacher had students review the learning target as she read it aloud and then had a student read it aloud in Chinese. The teacher prompted students to get ready to discuss the start of the American Revolution in their groups and used visuals for support. The teacher included questions to foster the discussion, but these were predominantly low-level recall questions.

- During an eighth-grade ICT math class, students worked in groups together on the application of linear systems. Discussion in groups was focused on a task, and the teacher rotated through the room asking questions to promote thinking. When she noted errors, she was able to redirect students without giving away answers. A student from one group demonstrated the group’s work on the screen while other students had an opportunity to ask her questions. During a seventh-grade math class, students worked in pairs on solving word problems with inequalities. The teacher asked students about the inequality word in one problem. Before responding, students engaged in a turn-and-talk to increase discussion. Students then shared responses, identifying “at most” as the inequality word. Finally, the teacher followed up with a mini-lesson about what ‘at most’ meant for the problem. During an eighth-grade ELA lesson about writing and revising introduction paragraphs, the teacher read model paragraphs from the screen that included anecdotes and a hook. Students were then asked to discuss their own paragraphs with turn-and-talk partners. In each classroom visited, student discussions reflected high levels of participation.

- During a seventh-grade math class, students worked on solving an equation to find the point of intersect of two lines. The teacher prompted students to collaborate on this problem. Next, a student went to the board to model her work, explaining her steps in solving the problem to her peers, who had an opportunity to ask her questions. The teacher then modeled a problem on the board and asked students questions about it, with one student called upon three times. During a sixth-grade social studies class, the teacher prepared the class for a debate about ancient Egyptian religion and reviewed student goals connected to a discussion rubric. However, not all students and groups were fully engaged in group discussion during preparation for the debate. Thus, while high levels of student thinking and participation were evident across most classrooms, they were missing in some classrooms.
Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and students and offer support. Teacher teams and staff systematically communicate unified high expectations for all students.

Impact

Communication and PD around high expectations result in a culture of mutual accountability. A culture for learning through high expectations is established so that students are prepared for the next level and own their educational experiences through student-led conferences.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations of mutual accountability through teacher triad teams that meet together and focus on a problem of practice connected to classroom instruction and the school’s instructional goals. This collaboration is supported through an intervisitation model. Triads involve all teachers playing a role of accountability to improve instruction and student outcomes. During a triad team inquiry cycle, teachers meet together weekly, with each one taking a turn to focus on a specific problem of practice related to the schoolwide goal of increasing student discussion. One teacher hosts the other two members of the triad during an intervisitation and they then meet to debrief and review noticings and wonderings. Each member of the triad is responsible for sharing out and reporting to school leaders, thus contributing to the mutual accountability. The ILT, involving school leaders and teachers, reviews outcomes of triad teams. As a result, school leaders monitor instructional goals with input from teachers.

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and learning through regular PD around best practices aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and through observation feedback. For instance, this observation report included expectations for instruction: “As a next step in rigor keep the agenda/visuals up. However, use it to direct students to it when checking in with them so they learn how to use the materials around them independently.” Professional growth is ensured through teacher participation in various PD sessions during the year, including those centered on norming the use of the discussion rubric, using MAP data, and ELA writing and revision. Specific training sessions are also held on the Danielson Framework for Teaching components aligned to schoolwide goals, including managing student behavior and using questioning and discussion techniques. Moreover, a faculty handbook communicates high expectations to staff which includes a commitment to teacher partnerships, establishing a classroom environment with a ready-to-learn protocol, and a school discipline policy.

- All students, including students with disabilities and ELLs, benefit from frequent feedback and guidance as they receive individualized support to monitor their progress towards meeting their goals. The school uses an online grading program that gives parents, teachers, and students access to their class performance data. Students are held accountable to high expectations by being responsible for student-led conferences, during which they reflect on academic challenges and successes with their teacher and parents. This is also an opportunity for students and staff to work on the implementation of student portfolios. A change was implemented this school year regarding high expectations, as the school has enrolled all eighth-grade students in Algebra, and they will be taking the Algebra I Regents at the end of the school year. Students reported that they feel prepared for the next level through classes like Algebra, which is preparing them for Regents. Furthermore, counselors provide guidance supports through workshops regarding the high school application process and by hosting high school and college fairs. Students also reported going on multiple college trips during the school year that helped them to set goals about attending college in the future, maintaining high expectations for all students.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

School leaders and teacher peers support the development of teachers, including those new to the profession, with the strategic use of observation cycles in meetings prior to finalizing reports, which accurately provides effective feedback and next steps using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practice, supports teacher development, and aligns with professional goals for teachers. This results in the elevation of schoolwide instructional practices and the implementation of strategies that promote professional growth and reflection.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers are observed by both the principal and assistant principal. A strategic use of these frequent cycles of classroom observations is the development of a spreadsheet summarizing observation data. The school leaders analyze these data to help target areas of growth and to support the growth of individual teachers through professional goal-setting and follow-up meetings with teachers after classroom visits. For example, last school year a subset of teachers struggled with student behavior in class. In response, the school provided a two-day training on non-verbal classroom management. The training was open to all staff and two-thirds of teachers attended. Leaders also continue to see questioning and discussion strategies as a potential area for growth for teachers. The schoolwide goal of student-led discussion has also been maintained. As a result, the school developed a shared discussion rubric, and school leaders focused their teacher triad work on student-led discussion. Teachers participate in teacher-led triad intervisitation as a form of peer support. Thus, observation practices result in the implementation of strategies and practices that support the development of teachers.

- Each rated item on observation reports includes specific language from the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric, classroom observation evidence to support the rating, and actionable next steps. An example of effective feedback includes, “With the lesson, you shared the data you had collected about students, showing that students increased their talk by 76 percent from the first conversation to the second. So as next steps, you want to increase the time for more of the free-flowing debate as the structures become less necessary.” The professional goals outlined by teachers during initial planning conferences at the beginning of the year are used to guide feedback from school leaders during the cycles of classroom observations and visits. For instance, one example of feedback stated, “First we spoke about your professional goal, which is to improve turn and talks. You shared how you are trying to make it a very regular part of the class and building into each lesson. Having the regular structure is benefiting your students.” As a result, feedback articulates clear expectations that align with professional goals for teachers.

- After each cycle of observations, PD is evaluated by school leaders based on observation data. PD has directly led to improved teacher and student outcomes. Ratings based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric in the area of classroom environment have improved, with the number of Developing ratings decreasing from seven percent to five percent. In the area of using questioning and discussion techniques, teacher ratings increased from 2.79 in 2018-2019 to 3.06 in 2019-2020. The most recent data collection from administrative walk-throughs shows an increase in the percentage of comments involving facilitation and listening and speaking skills according to the student discussion rubric, from 17 percent in October to nearly 25 percent in February, as evidence of progress towards the discussion goal aligned with the discussion rubric. As a result, feedback to teachers from observations guides supports for teacher development.