Quality Review Report

2019-2020

Essex Street Academy
High School 02M294
350 Grand Street
Manhattan
NY 10002

Principal: Wallace Simpson

Dates of Review:
November 6, 2019 - November 7, 2019

Lead Reviewer: Buffie Whitfield
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

Essex Street Academy serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</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>Area of Celebration</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>Area of Focus</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>Additional Finding</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
### Area of Celebration

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

#### Findings

All curricula are strategically aligned to State standards and are authentic. Using student work and data the curricula is studied and refined throughout the school year.

#### Impact

Refinements have ensured that all students, including those in all sub-groups, across grades have access to the curricula, are cognitively engaged, and are able to demonstrate their thinking.

#### Supporting Evidence

The school is a member of the New York Performance Standards Consortium; therefore, students earn graduation by the completion of Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBATs) in all core subjects. Teachers design curricula that are aligned to the consortium’s PBAT rubrics, which are aligned to State standards. School leaders and staff believe that students achieve deep and meaningful learning when they collaborate to produce authentic products that require mastery of core disciplinary skills. A review of curricular documents reveals a selection of varied complex texts that require students to make connections to curricula that require synthesis, analysis, and problem solving. In science, students are tasked to engage in problem solving while creating authentic real-world connections. A living environment task requires students to analyze data from an experiment, create a case study about a psychotic drug and write a proposal for an experimental drug for the National Institute on Drug Abuse. A chemistry task requires students to prove which metal are both chemically effective and cost effective for moving iron contamination form drinking water based on the results of scientific tests on the metals.

- Higher order thinking skills and the State standards are embedded in the curricula across grades and subjects for all students. Lessons contain strategies and scaffolds, questions, tasks, and activities that require students to make implicit deductions, draw conclusions about various sources of information, and discern the implications and applications of information from one text to other sources of information. As a result, students develop deeper levels of understanding of complex texts. In Social Studies, Students are asked to pose questions such as, “What was the primary goal of the United States (U.S) foreign policy during the Cold War? Who were the winners and losers of the Cold War? What has been the primary goal of U.S foreign policy since the Cold War?” to support their theses formulation.

- Revisions to the curricula and lesson plans are made based on the analysis of student work and other formative assessment data. All lesson plans include an access, challenge, and adjust strategies for students with disabilities. For example, in a lesson plan students are placed in topic groupings in order to accommodate for all students’ need. Teachers consistently use protocols for looking at student work and determine student mastery of concepts for each unit of study. Revisions are then made to address the gaps that have been revealed. Revisions result in revision of sequence of topics, additional lessons and the selection of culturally relevant materials to support student learning. The need for a greater focus, on analysis surfaced. Specific scaffolds and additional lessons were employed resulting in improved student writing.
Area of Focus

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

Findings

Standards-aligned teaching practices reflect a belief that students learn best through authenticity, collaboration, and revision and improvement tasks. These practices are evident across most but not all classrooms.

Impact

Although students in all content areas engage in high levels of thinking and produce meaningful work, it is not yet evident in all classes.

Supporting Evidence

- Most teachers facilitated high-level discussions and assigned tasks that engaged students in topics with relevance to their own lives. In a Social Studies class, the focus of the lesson was on supporting students in becoming a political pundit. Students annotated texts in literacy, science, math, and social studies classes to document their thinking as they read. In one class, students used statistical representations to better demonstrate their understanding of the world around them. The students shared answers and then asked questions about different strategies. In a social studies class, students similarly used annotation strategies to help them identify ways to approach immigration policy.

- In some classrooms, students engaged in discussions choosing the tasks they were to complete. For example, in a Science class, students selected diets that would be safe for their fictitious client based on their life goals and medical conditions. In another class, students clarified relationships about the role of DNA and chromosomes in coding the instructions for characteristic traits passed from parents to offspring. In one science class, however, the model demonstration did not fully illustrate the focus of the lesson on topographical maps, and the students were not clear on their next steps as they approached the task of writing predicted outcomes.

- Most instructional activities support the school belief that students are to engage with challenging materials, collaborate, take part in substantive conversation with peers, and self-assess work against established criteria. Most classrooms provided opportunities for activities to support diverse learners. In a few classes, there were missed opportunities for all students to be engaged in a sustained discussion and students’ responses waned due to the absence of discussion protocols. In a Statistic class, teacher posed questions that asked students to think about the difficulty of typing a response and the ease of typing a response. The teacher took responses from students calling out with the opportunity to build upon their peer’s responses not in evidence. Additionally, conversation was subjective and tangential. Students did not cite textual evidence, historical relevance, and the reasoning when explaining the mathematical proofs as was expected.
Findings
Teachers use curricula-aligned assessments and rubrics to create a clear picture of student mastery. Results of benchmark assessments, PBATs, as well as student work, are analyzed to make curricular and instructional adjustments across grades and subjects.

Impact
Due to the curricular adjustments resulting from effective assessment practices all students, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, Multi-Language Learners, and all other sub-groups demonstrate high levels of mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Across the vast majority of classrooms students were observed using universal Consortium-endorsed rubrics, classwork rubrics, and task-based rubrics to guide them in their work. During the student meeting, students shared their understanding of their assessment data and their status relative to the continuum of mastery. They referenced their goals generated from meaningful feedback, and classroom assessment data. They consistently outlined next steps for their work due to their understanding of the feedback they were provided. Students not only spoke about their next steps but they were able to elaborate on how they were going to achieve their goals. One student said that she did a great job contextualizing the research and grounding the theses in the research. Another student shared that he needs to work on critique, and experimental design, specifically, evaluating the data and identifying the bias in the design. Students attribute this clear internalization of how to move towards mastery to the meaningful feedback that makes them personally accountable for their learning.

- Teachers use summative assessments by analyzing PBATs results to adjust daily design and delivery of instruction. Common assessments are analyzed to determine where students currently are in terms of content mastery and cognitive process acquisition relative to the expected level of achievement, followed by the creation of next steps to bridge any gaps that surface. As a result of this clinical process, the school's common assessment data supports student growth and movement within levels, ultimately leading to a four-year graduation rate of 90 percent. There is an 85 percent graduation rate among Students with Disabilities, which supersedes the borough and the City.

- Common assessments are administered and analyzed across each department. As an example, item analysis of the results in Algebra II and Statistics was used to determine common student struggles regarding their inability to fully engage with data in the real world. Teachers specifically addressed this in the next unit, and analyzed student work on the end-of-unit benchmark assessment. Next steps were then identified and the concept of turning data into normal distributions was taught. The math department teacher team’s revision of the curriculum to connect to a larger purpose, specifically providing student experiences where they conducted observational studies, collected and represented data with different statistical representations and made statistical claims using confidence intervals, z-scores, standard deviations and bias resulted in increases in student mastery as measured by their PBATs.
### Additional Finding

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

#### Findings

Through an online blog platform called the Authenticity Project, school leaders and staff consistently communicate high levels of expectations addressing teaching and learning across the school. All staff members communicate clear expectations to their students for college and career readiness.

#### Impact

A culture of high expectations promotes shared accountability for teaching and learning resulting in a culture of mutual accountability for both staff and students to meet the schoolwide expectations.

#### Supporting Evidence

- The school’s teacher-leaders and teams provide the entire staff clear understandings regarding what is expected. Staff members establish a culture for learning through the practice of student self-identification that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for college and career readiness for students. During a teacher team interview teachers explained that the principal models a high work ethic which underscores the expectations and inspires them. This belief by the teachers is evidenced on the School Survey that reveals 96 percent of staff report they trust in the principal, which is 15 percent above the City average.

- A review of the principal’s weekly highlights and emails to the staff outlines the focus on increasing rigor in the classrooms through incorporating analysis of tasks and making data-based adjustments to lessons. One teacher shared that the staff commitment to continuously increasing rigor by refining the curriculum maps to reflect authentic content is a core value that holds them together and accountable to each other. Another teacher stated, “We hold each other accountable by participating in intervisitations with colleagues and receiving instructional training through the Consortium.” Another teacher added, “This is a rigorous environment and we all focus on making each other better.”

- College and career readiness is embedded in student learning beginning in grade nine with field trips, advisory lessons, and culminates in grade twelve with a mandatory course that supports students through college search, application and financial aid. All students have a dedicated counselor. For example; one counselor specifically supports students with disabilities in making their transition plans. Students have clear ownership of their educational journey and are able to articulate an understanding of how staff systematically defines those expectations. One student shared that teachers ensure all students have the right to obtain information and are to be held to high academic standards. Teachers explain why students need to improve on their work and how to do better while “constantly revising to make the work better.” All students interviewed agreed with this sentiment. Through regular ongoing communication, this support extends through their first year at college, resulting in college persistence data showing an increase from 57 percent to 71 percent in the last four years. The postsecondary enrollment rate is currently at 81 percent.
Findings
School leaders provide effective feedback to strengthen curricula and to define teachers’ strengths and specific areas they find challenging. A clear, informed system for providing differentiated professional development opportunities exists and is used strategically to improve student work products.

Impact
The effective feedback and differentiated professional learning experiences result in improved pedagogical practices and accelerated student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have a structured teacher observation system in place that uses low-inference notes aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders visit classrooms together in order to norm their process and align the feedback they offer to teachers. Feedback to teachers captures the strengths of the observed lesson and teachers are provided with timely and actionable next steps that include expectations for implementation of suggested practices in subsequent classroom visits. School leaders provide feedback to build the curricula and strengthen teacher practice. For example, “I would like to see greater alignment between the first project about the personal immigration experience and immigration policy studied. Secondly, a greater degree of using assessment in instruction which targets the quality of student work, going beyond checklists.” School leaders provide teachers feedback regarding the effective use of cooperative groups including suggestions to ensure full student engagement with assigned roles and responsibilities, such as note taker, timekeeper and facilitator.

- School leaders support staff with training and professional development experiences connected to improving the quality of student work products and retention. Teachers are supported through a variety of in-house and Consortium-endorsed professional development specifically to meet the school goal of deepening understanding and improve implementation of authentic instruction and PBATs. Several teachers have completed their administrative internship in the school while others have been promoted to leadership roles. Teachers participate on the professional development team, collaborative pods (interdepartmental), promotional review committee, community support squad, department teams, equity working group, Individualized Education Plan Writing Team, and School Leadership team. Teachers value the principals’ collaborative succession plans while recognizing staff that show an interest through surveys and participation in many team structures in school leadership.

- Through thoughtful analysis of teacher practices, the school’s professional development plans are adjusted to address identified trends in teacher practice that are areas of need. For example, strong and effective teachers were asked to become teacher mentors allowing administration to support them as they support their peers. Additionally, based on student achievement, an additional layer of teacher support is in place, enabling the staff to benefit from the peer support for new teachers. As a result of both targeted professional development and multiple layers of support for improvements unit plans evidenced teachers’ increased ability to develop and plan challenging activities, thus improving the quality of student work.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Teacher teams meet regularly to create curricula and strengthen PBAT using protocols and practices for examining student work products, systematically examine their pedagogy and share strategies for improving teaching and learning. Distributed leadership structures are evident across the school community.

Impact

All staff members assume mutual responsibility for collectively improving teacher practice and student performance and play an integral role in high-level decisions addressing student learning schoolwide.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders provide all teachers with teaching schedules that articulate specific times for planning with their peers. Teams meet regularly to examine student work and use Google Doc to store memorialized note findings, wonderings and next steps. During an observed Science team meeting, teachers analyzed an assessment to see if any groups of students are in need of targeted instruction, if the intervention employed is effective and any possible adjustments. Teachers shared that data analysis of written Science PBAT papers from last spring show that the skill standard was the weakest indicator. Teachers studied student responses, identified strengths and misconceptions, evaluated questions, and discussed student methods for solving. Teachers reviewed what could be learned about student understanding and pedagogy. The team determined that certain questions would be re-written to eliminate ambiguous possibilities and expectations for justifying responses would be added. Teamwork allowed for collaborative prediction, modifying tasks and creating questions from different perspectives. These consistent works positively impacted classroom instruction and ultimately lead to students’ success on their Science PBATs.

- Teachers have analyzed several exemplary responses in their subject areas, assessed the gap between students’ current level of mastery, in terms of evidence, reasoning, and claim statement, in relation to the anchor papers and exemplary responses. Teachers, also, analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data to determine the effectiveness of teaching practices and intervention strategies to outline additional interventions to address student needs. For example, advisors analyze and plan interventions for students who are not making adequate progress towards promotion and meeting graduation requirements.

- The principal strongly supports initiatives led by teachers that encourage teachers to work together across content areas. Teacher team leaders are able to collaborate across grades to make key decisions around curriculum, instructional strategies, and professional development opportunities for their colleagues. Teachers state that the principal trusts and empowers them to make decisions. They feel supported by the leadership and appreciate the opportunities to be creative within their subject and grade level responsibilities. Teachers developed programs, such as the Equity Working Group and took leadership roles in implementing new initiatives specifically those that created authenticity in the curriculum. During teacher team meetings teachers frequently spoke about their active involvement in making schoolwide decisions.