Quality Review Report

2019-2020

New Design Middle School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 05M514

625 West 133 Street
Manhattan
NY 10027

Principal: Marcellus Stovall

Dates of Review:
January 21, 2020 - January 22, 2020

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

New Design Middle School 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><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>
</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>
<td>Developing</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>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Findings

School leaders establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to the entire staff, using a variety of strategies. School leaders and staff effectively communicate with families the expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

The school leaders’ provision of training to staff supports a system of accountability that provides meaningful feedback to families about the progress of their children toward meeting goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal shares his high expectations with staff during faculty and professional development (PD) meetings. School leaders expressed the expectation that teachers understand each student’s entry point to support continued growth. This was evidenced by a review of the PD plan and agendas from various sessions, as well as observation feedback of teacher practice. Teachers shared that the high expectations that the principal has developed are communicated through observation feedback.

- School leaders communicate explicit expectations via bulletin boards, monthly newsletters, assemblies, and workshops for students and their families. Monthly calendars distributed to parents convey details on assessments, school and district events, and other information. Parents shared that teachers offer guidance and support and regularly send updates on their children’s progress via phone and outreach. Parents stated that the school offers workshops on the State standards to help them better understand the expectations of those standards. Parents shared that school leaders and teachers have an open-door policy, welcoming parents at any time of the school day to discuss their children’s social and academic progress. Parents also noted that progress reports and meetings with teachers help them to understand their children’s progress in school and how they can help them at home. One parent shared that her child’s teacher provided the link for a website to use at home, which helped to increase the student’s reading level this year.

- The school leaders provide a professional handbook to staff that outlines clear expectations and professional duties. The staff handbook also includes the school’s mission, expected lesson planning, and the use of preparation periods. The instructional focus resounds in the classrooms and was readily shared by school leaders and teachers. The teachers also indicated that they are held accountable for their own professional growth and for increasing students’ outcomes. Teachers hold themselves accountable for the school’s instructional focus through PD activities and learning walks, where they visit colleagues’ classrooms.
Findings
School leaders are developing a process to regularly evaluate and adjust instructional practices that ensure rigor across all classrooms, and the effectiveness of teacher team work, so that all students achieve mastery of State standards.

Impact
There are missed opportunities to meet the needs of students through coherent policies and practices, and the lack of processes to evaluate and adjust instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Weekly common planning meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on the curricula they have designed and also look at student work to assess challenges and determine adjustments that are needed. However, teachers were unable to articulate the process of assessing curriculum alignment to the State standards and overall curriculum implementation. Additionally, it was not clear that there are specific protocols in place for teachers to receive feedback around their curriculum maps. Teachers developed units of study. The school community is developing a process to evaluate effectiveness. There is a lack of a formalized plan for teachers to meet in order to evaluate and adjust assessment, grading practices, curriculum, and instruction, or to meet the demands of the State standards and support the diverse learning needs of all students. There were highly inconsistent levels of rigor observed in classes, and a lack of checks for understanding across classrooms.

- School leaders sometimes participate in teacher meetings. Other times, the monitoring of teacher team work is left to the coaches, leading to a lack of coherence in curriculum and assessment practices in the teams’ work. Combined with the teams’ shortcomings in memorializing their work, the school community’s process for regularly evaluating the quality of teacher team work and organizational resources is uneven. Although teachers collaborate, some teams are just beginning inquiry work to improve students’ academic outcomes. Protocols to share team findings on an ongoing basis are not formalized. This limits teachers’ capacity to fully evaluate students’ varied learning needs and make purposeful data-informed decisions on implementing new instructional approaches that maximize students’ achievement across all content areas.

- The lack of records on the work of teacher teams does not enable the staff to be reflective about practices, changes in practice, and teachers’ focus on lesson planning and assessment. While some teachers make adjustments to individual lesson plans, they are not refining the curriculum maps with the adjustments they implement. Similarly, some teachers are creating new assessments for students in team meetings, but this work is not coherent for all teams. Weekly meetings are held to share data, but the adjustments made based on the data are not recorded or shared in formal ways to enable the team members to memorialize the work of either individual teachers or the entire teams. This limits their ability to monitor their effectiveness and be reflective about practices that are working, and those that are not.
**Additional Finding**

| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Developing |

**Findings**

Curricula and academic tasks reflect a process to begin aligning teacher’s work to the State standards and planning to provide students with access. However, curricula and tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects.

**Impact**

Consistent access to and ownership of rigorous curricula that cognitively engage all students are uneven and hinder college and career readiness for all students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- One of the school community’s initiatives is to build and strengthen curricular units. Teacher teams are at different stages developing State standard-aligned curricula and performance tasks. Some teachers use published curricula, and others create their own. Some lessons elicit student thinking and provide rigorous content-based tasks, but others are inconsistent in their emphasis on rigorous tasks and higher-order thinking skills. For example, an English Language Arts (ELA) lesson challenges students to cite evidence from the text. In another ELA lesson plan, the learning target reviews juxtaposition but does not address multiple Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels. These inconsistencies in the units and tasks hinder some students’ access to high-level academic tasks that develop higher-order thinking skills and meaningful engagement.

- Lesson plans across content areas do not consistently evidence planning to integrate literacy into cross-content instruction. For example, in an ELA lesson, visual aids are included to provide information for students on the habits of effective reading. However, science lesson plans evidence that students are assigned identical recall tasks that do not reflect opportunities for high levels of student thinking and engagement. In science, many lessons revolve around worksheets. Similarly, a social studies worksheet asks students to complete a true or false exercise pertaining to the causes of the American Revolution. Several students stated that tasks across some subjects are not challenging.

- A review of ELA lesson plans indicates some modifications and revisions to address the needs of classroom learners, especially students with disabilities. For example, an ELA plan is modified to address students’ learning needs by providing scaffolds during the lesson to help students answer the essential questions being addressed. A math lesson plan indicates the manipulatives for students to use while problem-solving. However, extensions are not evident across all classes. The principal stated that the school is in the process of reviewing, modifying, and revising the curriculum to strengthen access and engage all learners in rigorous tasks.
Findings

Instructional strategies across classrooms, including the use of scaffolds, extensions, and questioning, are not sufficiently differentiated to provide appropriately challenging and rigorous learning opportunities that promote high student achievement.

Impact

The inconsistent delivery of instruction does not provide multiple entry points for all students, and does not always foster discussions that are appropriately challenging for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- In a science class, the teacher posed questions in rapid succession and students responded in unison to the teacher. Students sat in groups but worked independently. Other students finished the activity but were not provided with extensions to support their learning. Problems were not tiered, nor were there additional, differentiated problems to further challenge students who were more advanced. Consequently, classrooms across the grades and subjects inconsistently use extensions and appropriate strategies to engage all learners.

- Across visited classrooms, where there were a number of students with disabilities, the lesson was the same for all students. The teacher asked and answered questions with little student input, or students responded as a whole group to the teacher. The teacher asked questions that were at times unclear, such as, “What do you say about England being tyrannical towards the colonies?”, “On which purpose do you pay taxes?”, and “How would you feel if your taxes went down?” Students were not engaged and some students asked “Do I have to write this?” and said “This is too much work!” Some students shared that they were finished. There were no additional supports to assist the students in understanding the content they were reading and the discussion consisted of just repeating opinions.

- In a few classes, students who participated in class discussions were beginning to use accountable conversation prompts. For instance, in some classes, students were prompted to turn and talk, but the conversation resulted in students being off track, without mutual accountability. In another class, the teacher challenged students to cite textual evidence. Without accountable talk stems to provoke discussions and tiered questions, student engagement waned. Student-to-student interaction and discussion were inconsistent across the visited classrooms. Teachers in numerous classrooms essentially repeated student answers and evaluated the accuracy of student responses themselves rather than inviting the class to agree, disagree, elaborate upon the responses of their peers, or ask questions of one another.
**Additional Finding**

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

Teachers inconsistently analyze student progress on common assessments across subject areas. Assessment practices are loosely aligned with the curricula and teachers inconsistently use ongoing checks for understanding and self-assessment to gauge student understanding across classes.

**Impact**

Feedback to students and teachers is limited. Clear, effective adjustments to curricula and instruction across classes inconsistently meet the learning needs of all students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A review of student feedback reflected a few teachers’ efforts to use a rubric to capture students’ strengths and areas of growth. Yet, some of the feedback, such as, “You should try to research more topics.”, and “You should try to review your grammar” did not provide students with actionable next steps and strategies. Some students were able to interpret their teachers’ feedback and explain the meaning of the comments provided. However, other students were unable to articulate the meaning of the feedback or share strategies given to improve the quality of their work on the task.

- Across classrooms, teachers use one-to-one conferences to gauge the level of student understanding. However, teachers inconsistently use strategies during the lesson to determine the level of all students’ learning needs. In some classrooms, teachers conferred with certain students, yet other students who demonstrated difficulty in their work did not have their needs addressed. Furthermore, in student work products where the use of student self-assessment was evident, there were few examples of clear adjustments to address next steps for students to enhance the quality of their work. In a few of the visited classrooms, teachers conferred with students and noted their answers. However, the practice of adjusting instruction was not evident across all classrooms. In many of the classes, teachers walked from group to group and spoke with students, but they did not record student questions or misunderstandings. In a math class, while students worked in groups, the teacher circulated around the room to interact with students. Although some teachers circulate around the classroom as students work, this practice did not always lead to adjustments to lessons.

- Teacher feedback was inconsistent on the samples of student work provided. The work did not reflect the use of rubrics or offer meaningful feedback from teachers, including next steps. Students shared samples of their work, which included ungraded assignments or tasks. Some work was only marked with a fraction denoting how many questions the student had answered correctly, such as 40/100 or 3/4. A lack of rubrics and of task specificity was evident. Some work had a check or comments, such as “Excellent work”, or “Study more to improve.” In a few classrooms, students used rubrics to guide their work and received verbal and written feedback for their next steps. Most student responses exemplified feedback that was not prescriptive in nature and students did not know their academic levels. Specifically, one student stated that the teacher told them that they are progressing. Students struggled to explain how they would progress to the next level. Across the school, the feedback on student work posted on bulletin boards, provided during the student meeting, and viewed in notebooks or in portfolios was not consistently clear or actionable.
Findings

The school community is developing protocols to enable the majority of teachers to collaboratively engage in inquiry work. Distributed leadership structures are developing across the school.

Impact

The work of teacher teams does not currently strengthen the instructional practices of the majority of teachers, thus limiting opportunities for increased student learning. The development of lead teacher positions is beginning to support leadership capacity building.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher team members collaborate on activities such as reviewing student work. However, teacher reflections on their pedagogy indicate that the impact of the teacher teamwork on student achievement is not refined. Teams are focused on gathering additional data to assess the impact of their current teaching approaches. Agendas collected from team meetings indicate various topics discussed during meetings, such as content area bulletin boards, writing rubrics, math curricula, and social studies and science teaching points. There was insufficient evidence that teams engage in inquiry-based collaborative work that is based upon the analysis of student work and data to move specific sub-groups of students, strengthen curricula across all subjects, and improve teachers’ instructional practices.

- During a team meeting, members reviewed student work. There was a general discussion of the scores and characteristics of student responses as participants shared noticings. However, the discussion did not thoroughly analyze the task to guide an accurate assessment of student mastery of the skills involved. Furthermore, it was also unclear which specific skills presented challenges for each student, and how interventions would be differentiated for students in each of the scoring categories. The discussion was more focused on next steps than on meeting the needs of individual students.

- To better support subject-specific departments, school leaders have begun developing lead teachers to assist with curriculum development, lesson design, and in-class implementation of techniques. Teacher-leads articulated that they felt empowered to be included on decisions toward the development and support of their peers. For example, teachers spoke about the support that they receive from each other and having the time to work together. Teachers also shared that they are refining the grading policies so that all teachers are normed on their evaluation of content, academic, and social-emotional expectations across the school community.