Quality Review Report

2019-2020

The Active Learning Elementary School

Early Childhood 25Q244

137-20 Franklin Avenue
Queens
NY 11355

Principal: Robert Groff

Dates of Review:
March 11, 2020 - March 12, 2020

Lead Reviewer: Daniel Kim
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 Active Learning Elementary School serves students in grade PK through grade 3. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
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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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</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>
<td>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to State standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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</table>
## Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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### Findings

The school’s approach to culture building, discipline, and social emotional support is driven by a theory of action. School leaders strategically align schoolwide efforts with the school motto, “body, mind, and character.”

### Impact

Students have meaningful decision-making voice in schoolwide improvement efforts. The work of the entire school community results in a safe school environment and inclusive culture that supports progress toward the school’s goals and in students’ adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school’s theory of action for culture building is exemplified by its schoolwide motto, of “body, mind and character”. Specifically, by creating a diverse socially-conscious learning environment students will develop a strong sense of physical and social emotional well-being that would serve them to become life-long learners. This is applied consistently across the school, from its physical wellness program, which infuses movement practices in classrooms across the building, to the health and nutrition focus in healthy eating at breakfast and lunch. These values are re-emphasized in classroom and non-classroom settings through teacher- and student-led lessons and discussions. Students initiate, guide, and lead improvement efforts that echo the motto, impacting student experiences. For example, students in support of the wellness theme initiated a school review of food choices. Students advocated for eliminating chocolate milk from the food options to minimize sugar intake. Consequently, it was taken off the menu. Students continue to serve as food tasters in partnership with the school nutritionist to make changes to the food menu options for breakfast and lunch, which has resulted in a vegetarian-only menu.

- In alignment with the “mind” and “character” component of the school motto, school leaders and faculty have initiated a review of schoolwide instructional practices to infuse culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE) practices across grades and content areas. Teachers conducted inquiry into curricula and pedagogy, noting needs for greater reflection of student backgrounds in various subject areas, such as in mentor texts and classroom libraries in English Language Arts (ELA), and in math word problems. In addition, staff members conduct a 12-week cycle of workshops for families that involve issues of racial equity, and there are plans in place to create a joint staff-parent racial equity committee to guide long-term school efforts. Parents, staff, and students unanimously agreed that the school community fosters a safe and respectful climate where the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs are readily addressed by all efforts. Students across grades and demographic backgrounds unanimously stated that they “see themselves” in the work that they are doing in their classrooms.

- Strategic alignment of professional development (PD), family outreach, and student learning experiences and supports, with elements of the school’s motto, result in students adopting effective academic and personal behaviors. In referencing the most recent book of the month, Jacqueline Woodson’s *The Day You Begin*, interviewed students related how the book gave them an opportunity to talk about when they sometimes felt like they did not fit in, and about how they found “ways to be brave” and being proud of who they were. Parents related that their children are articulating concepts of equity and fairness at home, and noted increased engagement and motivation of not only doing their schoolwork but what they are learning through it. One parent shared how her child asked to change their most recent family vacation to Washington, D.C., so that they can see and discuss quotes displayed at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.
Findings
School leaders, and teacher peers who participate in grade-inquiry teacher teams, support development of all teachers through cycles of observations, peer-led classroom intervisitations, and analysis of student work.

Impact
While teachers receive feedback on their practice that articulates clear expectations and support of their development, there are missed opportunities for strategic use of the cycles of observations to develop a transparent system for managing PD that is aligned with the findings.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of cycles of formal observation reports evidence that they serve as a foundation for teacher feedback and accurately capture strengths and challenges aligned with the components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The reports specifically include the targeting of student work products by citing student quotes and actions as part of the feedback on classroom practice. Further analysis of student achievement and work products is deepened through discussions at individual and team levels about student performance on benchmark assessments, such as beginning- and middle-of-year tests in math and on-going running records in literacy. Teachers unanimously stated that feedback from observations is concrete with clear and actionable next steps that improve their practice.

- Supervisory and teacher peer-support practices are in alignment with the schoolwide instructional focus. School administrators and faculty conduct walkthroughs and observe instructional practices to identify patterns and trends around the schoolwide instructional focus, to support CRSE practices across grades. Utilizing a university-developed checklist, school leaders and teachers identified strengths of practice, as well as areas for improvement, which then are addressed with specific teachers, during grade-team meetings, and during staff conferences for PD, such as lesson and unit planning revisions and edits. However, while such practices provide effective feedback on instructional practices, school leaders do not yet strategically use feedback from the frequent cycles of observations to incorporate suggestions around CSRE practices. Consequently, representing a missed opportunity to further deepen and elevate CSRE systems schoolwide.

- School leaders use observation data, from both official and unofficial visits to the classroom, to design PD. Staff developers and content-area consultants’ work with teachers on a variety of pedagogical topics, ranging from unit planning, developing cross-grade coherence, or refining individual instructional practices such as guided reading. While school administrators coordinate the work and focus of the various staff developers, there is not yet a strategic and transparent system that fully coordinates and coherently aligns teacher-led PD with current processes including teacher professional goal-setting, observation feedback, and the work of staff developers.
Additional Finding

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

Curricula and planning documents across grades and subjects coherently emphasize rigorous habits such as the use of thinking maps to organize planning and support students to demonstrate their thinking. Academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data from assessments.

Impact

All learners, including Multi-Lingual learners (MLLs) and students with disabilities, demonstrate their thinking, have access to the curricula, and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- In a kindergarten lesson plan, the task requires students to utilize a bubble map to first brainstorm and then generate their inquiry topics for a student-initiated study on babies. First-grade plans include the use of flow maps in support of student writing. The maps include a defined section for the articulation of a topic sentence and then three reasons around the writing of paragraphs. Grade-two students are to be supported in synthesizing three reasons evident in an author’s persuasive text via the use of a tree map, and then the students follow a flow map on how to give peer feedback on their math problem-solving work. In plans across grades and content areas, students use thinking maps to not only demonstrate their thinking but also apply classroom and writing procedures, analyze parts of a whole, compare and contrast items and ideas, evaluate points of view and help them create new thinking.

- Across the vast majority of reviewed planning documents, academic tasks reflect the purposeful use of student data so that all students have access to rigorous tasks. For example, plans for a grade-three social studies lesson task students to analyze how geographical features impact human settlement, with a particular focus on China to reflect the demographic background of the classroom students. Utilizing student data from reading levels, in-class assessment practices and State assessment data, plans include seven groups of students working on tasks with varying levels of text difficulty. This is reflected by those working on higher-level texts based on their reading levels, a group of MLLs who are supported with sentence frames and visual vocabulary support, and other heterogeneous groupings of students, who are supported with thinking maps, are working on either modeling the use of oral language, open-ended questions, sentence starters, and/or the embedding of linguistic frames. For students with disabilities, plans include adjusted criteria for success.

- Plans for a grade-one literacy-center time block was based on student performance data from multiple benchmark assessments to plan purposeful strategies for student groupings. Drawing from Fountas and Pinnell assessments, cross-referencing conference notes from various providers, and New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) data, plans for individuals and groups of students focus on building fluency strategies, voicing characters differently, using punctuation marks, and specific decoding strategies. Specifically, supports included story and vocabulary previews for guided-reading groups, punctuation reminders, and text-to-life prompts for students to extrapolate and make connections to their own experiences. Such use of student data to refine and adjust planning for individuals and groups of students was evident in the vast majority of plans and result in student cognitive engagement.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies such as the use of small-group instruction strategically provide multiple-entry points and meaningful extensions for all learners. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

Impact

All learners, including MLLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching strategies such as small-group, tiered student work, visual vocabulary supports, and discussion scaffolds, provide multiple-entry points for a variety of learners to be able to be engaged in challenging work. For example, grade-three students as part of the whole-group instruction first used a thinking map to structure and demonstrate their thinking, including sketching the problem, using math models, identifying a specific strategy, and answering the question in a complete word or number sentence. Students were then assigned into six homogenous groups, with questions at different levels of difficulty based on numbers and problem formation. Specific groups of students were supported with vocabulary previews, use of pictures, and focusing prompts. Those at or above mastery were challenged with different questions but were also tasked with identifying unnecessary information and then solve multi-step problems.

- Students during a grade-one literacy center bloc worked either independently and/or in guided stations to complete their work. One group of students worked with the English as a New Language (ENL) teacher in a guided-reading group to build their fluency by changing their voices aligned to the punctuation marks to sound like a character. A group of “expanding” MLLs focused their attention, with the help of the classroom teacher, on vocabulary previews in preparation for their social studies community unit and used non-fiction text features to help them organize their noticings. Individual students were observed working in a listening station to highlight initial sounds. Students who were performing at or above mastery were observed responding to individualized teacher prompts designed to reinforce meaning as part of a journal exercise. Such teaching strategies support all learners so that they demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student discussions and work products.

- Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership across the vast majority of the classrooms visited. Grade-three students, during a math lesson, conducted a gallery walk of their peers’ math problem solving work samples. Working as student partners they first discussed their noticings, successful and unsuccessful math strategies, and offered suggestions to improve either the clarity of student thinking, application of strategies, or the use of math-content vocabulary. Students then left sticky notes on each other’s charts with their noticings, and continued to provide feedback on other charts. Following the gallery walk, student partnerships were observed and heard evaluating the peer feedback left on sticky notes on their own charts, making decisions on which made the most sense to them or would be the most helpful to their own math thinking, resulting in revisions on their work. Such level of student ownership and student thinking was evident across the vast majority of classes.
Findings

School leaders and faculty use a variety of assessments aligned to the curricula to provide a clear portrait of student mastery. Utilizing data from common assessments and assessment practices teachers and school leaders adjust curricula and instructional practices.

Impact

Assessment results are used to provide meaningful feedback to teachers and students, and all students, including MLLs and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- Using results from the school’s assessment practices, school leaders and faculty create a clear portrait of student mastery leading to actionable and meaningful feedback. This provides students with the supports needed to promote growth across content areas. For example, following each benchmark literacy assessment, teachers identify and record specific strategies that students are to use to improve their reading. Students interviewed directly referenced these strategies as part of the feedback received. One student described that the feedback he received following a reading conference was to stop and ask himself if he really understood what the author meant. He described using pictures, context clues, noting initial sounds and other strategies to make sure that he comprehended the story. The student further described how the feedback had been helpful for him in his non-fiction reading and continued to use it moving forward with other assignments. Students across grades related receiving meaningful feedback not only in their reading work, but also in their literary essays, math problem solving, and argumentative writing in social studies.

- School leaders and teachers use common assessments such as the NYS ELA and math tests and curricula-based assessments to identify trends and patterns regarding student progress and as a reference about student needs, resulting in programmatic and scheduling changes. For example, school leaders and teachers utilize various literacy assessments such as the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments, Developmental Reading Assessments, and the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) results to make adjustments to targeted intervention programs and to determine extensions for those at or above mastery. Students are assigned to groups that meet three times a week, either before or after school, in intervention groupings led by English as a New Language teachers during the school day, and/or participate in leveled literacy and reading intervention programs from grades one to three.

- Across the school, teachers utilize common assessments and data from in-class assessments to adjust curricula and instructional decisions to support a variety of learners. Grade-three students use the open array to model various multiplication problems. Planning documents for this observed lesson utilized student performance from previous assessments to create purposeful student groups, with specific areas of foci and supports for each group. Focus areas included working on additional arrays and building fact fluency. Supports for MLLs, based on individual student needs as ascertained by NYSESLAT performance levels, included specific vocabulary previews, while planned supports for students with disabilities included opportunities to act out word problems as well as physical manipulatives to create arrays. Such use of assessments to adjust instructional decisions has led to increased mastery towards and beyond grade level mastery for all students, including students with disabilities and MLLs, as measured by Fountas and Pinnell reading levels and Developmental Reading Assessments.
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>
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</table>

**Findings**

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work utilizing a CRSE lens. Distributed leadership structures, such as grade leaders, are embedded throughout the school.

**Impact**

The work of teacher teams results in improvements in instructional practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. Through distributed leadership structures teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers conduct inquiry across grades to systematically examine elements of their work, resulting in shared improvements in teacher practice. Artifacts from a grade-two inquiry include teacher reflections on the use of a university-developed scorecard to analyze and evaluate the culturally responsiveness of a reading curriculum plan. Teachers conducted self- and peer-evaluations on their own practices, noting that few characters in their studies were portrayed in culturally and historically accurate ways, that the materials were disconnected from student lives, and there were no direct instructions that explicitly linked the curricula to student lives. Instructional and curricula changes evident between a pre-revision and post-revision character study planning documents included using characters from diverse backgrounds to model reading strategies such as character traits, changes over time, points of view, and inferencing. Other changes included the use of read alouds as additional opportunities to explicitly discuss opportunities for the students to be agents of positive social change. Pre-and-post inquiry scorecard results across grades demonstrate improved scores on representation, social justice orientation, and teachers’ materials across content areas.

- Grade-three teachers met to conduct inquiry into student work on a recent end of unit math assessment. They identified trends and patterns of student performance aligned to specific skills and standards, including the need to focus more attention on breaking down multi-step word problems and developing greater number sense around multiplication. Teachers then identified teaching strategies and changes to instruction, such as spending additional foci on story problem break-apart strategies for whole group instruction, additional reviews on distributive properties in small group instruction, and scaffolding thinking maps to help students break down multi-step word problems. Teachers also reassigned students to inter-class enrichment and intervention groups so that they would be taught by the classroom teachers, service providers, intervention specialists and school administrators. Such systematic inquiry work resulted in mastery of goals for groups of students, including 86 percent of grade-three students performing at Level 3 or 4. This includes 92 percent of current or former MLLs performing at or above grade-level mastery and 22 percent higher than the district average.

- Faculty plays integral leadership roles, such as grade leaders or inquiry facilitators, to make key decisions for the school community. Teachers noted the need to embed a greater representation of student lives and backgrounds within academic work across grades and content areas. This in turn has informed the schoolwide instructional focus to build CRSE practices, and the entire teaching faculty engaged in cycles of inquiry to self- and peer-assess as to whether or not such practices were evident in everyday classroom work. This effort has driven PD in planning sessions and curriculum revisions, as well as family workshops discussing inclusive curricula design.