Quality Review Report
2019-2020

Kappa
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 09X215
3630 Third Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456

Principal: Sheri Warren

Dates of Review:
January 8, 2020 - January 9, 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

Kappa 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>
</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>
</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>Area of Focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide roadmaps through faculty handbooks tied to expectations for students regarding a path to college and career readiness via college tours.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations exists at this school and students are supported in reaching their goals. Articulation and college tours ensure that all students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers engage in professional learning to support them in meeting the needs of students. To this end, teachers regularly receive ongoing and targeted feedback to improve their practice through observations and visits by the instructional coach, assistant principals and principal. Teachers’ professional learning goals are memorialized so that they are held accountable for meeting school-wide expectations.

- The principal provides focused and targeted leadership that clearly communicates expectations for elevated academic achievement. Additionally, she models excellence while providing the necessary supports and accepting the responsibility as the school's leader for more than 15 years. The entire staff promotes a strong culture of high expectations to prepare students for a better future. This is evidenced throughout the community via workshops, faculty handbook, peer-visitations, progress reports, and orientations that exemplify a culture where accountability is reciprocal between all stakeholders. A teacher self-reflection tool is employed to support them in celebrating growth and strengthening their practice. Through frequent cycles of observation together with the completion of the teacher self-reflection tool staff are held accountable for meeting expectations for pedagogical practice. Teachers advise and hold each other accountable through regularly scheduled team meetings and inter-visitations where teachers work together to refine practices via co-planning opportunities.

- Teachers and other staff articulate high expectations and share information with students, leading to student progress towards mastery of State Standards together with college and career readiness. Students are aware of the skills needed to advance to the next level and teachers share insights into the next grade. During the interview, students in grades 6-8 shared their career aspirations and where they would like to attend secondary school and college. The school provides the middle school application timeline and competitive admissions information to students and families. KAPPA assists grade seven students with their college and career goals through college tours. As a result of the promulgation of pinnacle standards, the 2018-2019 NYC School Quality Report indicates that 98 percent of former grade eight students earned 9th grade credits.
Findings
School leaders and faculty have a process in place to regularly evaluate the instructional core and systems for improvement and work towards ensuring structures are more purposeful.

Impact
Even though there are periodic adjustments made to increase coherence, there are missed opportunities to make strategic adjustments aligned to State Standards to lead to more uniformity in the effectiveness of teacher teamwork experiences.

Supporting Evidence

- There is consistency in the way instructional planning documents are created and revised based on shared expectations for planning and preparation and execution of these lessons by most teachers. School staff have a built-in informal structure to review the effectiveness of curricular materials, assessment tools, and teaching practices on a regular basis. Although school leaders and staff utilize data to inform adjustments being made to curricular tools and resources there were missed opportunities for a strategic alignment between these constructs across some subject areas and departments. However, most teachers thoughtfully craft activities to provide appropriate scaffolds during learning activities, execute them, and assess learning for their student populations. The school continues to work on building greater alignment and coherence between what is taught and how teachers teach to all student populations and provide extensions to challenge students.

- Teacher teams meet to review curricula, lesson planning, implementation of effective pedagogical practices, and the quality of assessment practices to gauge student understanding. This work has helped teachers reflect on how to make the curricula more engaging and rigorous for a diversity of learners. Even though a suggested lesson-planning template is used across the school, there is an unevenness in the depth of strategic planning for modifications for students with disabilities and Multi-Language Learners. Most teachers modify curricula and informally glean best practices from each other to strengthen the instructional core so that there are no gaps in teaching, learning, planning, and assessment across the school. Staff members and school leaders articulated next steps to try to provide meaningful feedback aligned to the State Standards so that more students can internalize feedback.

- School leaders have increased their capacity for improvement by supporting the work of collaborative teacher teams both horizontally and vertically. These teams have streamlined their planning and inquiry by routinely analyzing data. During cabinet meetings school leaders review the agendas, minutes, and recommendations of teacher teams. However, while the cabinet speaks to processes to evaluate instructional and organizational practices of the school, some of the interactions with teacher teams have not been memorialized consistently. As a result, there are missed opportunities to effect more timely revisions to curriculum and teacher practice.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Curricula are aligned to the State Learning Standards and integrate close reading strategies. They consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills across grades and subject for all students.

Impact

The purposeful decisions that inform the development of curricula build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use the close reading strategy, which guides students to interact with the text. For example, a grade seven English Language Arts (ELA) unit plan showed that students would explore the experiences of people of Southern Sudan during and after the Second Sudanese Civil War. They build proficiency in using textual evidence to support ideas in their writing, both in shorter responses and in an extended essay. In a grade eight ELA curriculum map, a culminating task is for students to create a Readers’ Theater montage based on key quotes from the text and write an associated commentary to explain how and why their script remains true but also veers from the original text. Such tasks reflect a consistency in the use of a specific close reading strategy as well as an emphasis on higher-order thinking.

- Lesson plans are written following a common lesson planning format so that there is coherence from grade to grade. Lesson objectives are aligned to the State Learning Standards that are noted in the plans along with essential questions. One lesson plan addresses how students would explore writing personal narratives and refers to related language conventions and skills. Another plan outlines graphing proportional relationships, and interpreting the unit rate as the slope of the graph to solve problems involving distance, time and speed.

- Across grades and content areas, teachers create and use curriculum maps to guide their instruction from unit to unit. A unit from a grade six module on introduction and conclusion of a literary analysis, cites the learning standards “I can write informative/explanatory texts that convey ideas and concepts using relevant information that is carefully selected and organized. I can use evidence from a variety of grade-appropriate texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.” A science unit plan outlines key ideas about the development of scientific inquiry skills. Similar to other content areas, math and Living Environment curriculum maps include standards, essential questions, and unit goals.
Findings

Teaching practices are informed by the Danielson Framework and reflect the belief that students learn best when they engage in discussions. Across classrooms, students engage in discussions and complete challenging tasks.

Impact

Students are exposed to rigorous tasks and discussions across grades and content areas. However, instructional practices lead to missed opportunities to further extend learning for all students via tasks that elevate their thinking and promote ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders’ and teachers’ belief regarding how students learn best is informed by the school’s instructional focus on student discussion. Across classes, students engaged in complex tasks such as multi-step problem solving and demonstrated the ability to use accountable talk in their interactions, which in most cases led to facilitating their own learning. In the classrooms visited, teachers provided visual supports and scaffolds for students to be engaged in learning. Students were observed in small-group activities and working together with a partner to respond to the task. In a grade eight math class, groups of students computed the actual lengths of objects shown in a picture using the scale. Students identify the scale factor in order to make intuitive comparisons of size and then devise a strategy for finding actual lengths using the scale.

- School leaders place emphasis on providing students with multiple opportunities to participate in high level discussions that allow them to express diverse points of view, justify their thinking and challenge each other’s stance. In the classrooms visited, most teachers provided guiding questions, which required students to think deeply about concepts and skills being taught. However, in a few classrooms, there were limited opportunities for students to challenge each other’s thinking through high-level peer-to-peer questioning during discussions. For example, in one social studies class, which was teacher-directed, students were engaged in determining the significance of the Lascaux paintings. Some students within their group completed the task and sat waiting for their group mates to complete their question. Most of the lesson involved only a few students’ engagement in a teacher-student question-and-answer sequence that left little opportunity for other students to actively participate and share their thoughts.

- Across most classrooms, teachers provided guiding questions, which required students to think deeply about the concepts and skills taught. In a self-contained ELA class, students were citing textual evidence from the novel, To Kill a Mockingbird. Students were engaged in close reading strategies and discussing passages from the story. The same students were observed in a science class where students were involved in teacher-student question-and-answer sequences which limited the opportunity for other students to participate actively.
**Additional Finding**

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

Across classrooms, common assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula are reviewed to determine student progress across grades and subject areas. Common assessments, such as pre- and post-unit assessments, are employed to gauge student progress toward meeting goals across grades and subjects.

**Impact**

Actionable feedback for students and adjustments in instruction lead to progress toward goals related to academic achievement. Data from common assessments leads to adjustments that impact student learning. Teachers make effective adjustments in the classroom to meet all students' learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Classroom and hallway bulletin boards illustrate the use of rubrics to evaluate progress in student writing across grades. There are task-specific rubrics attached to units of instruction to measure levels of skills and content acquisition across disciplines. Most of the work samples contained rubric-based feedback to students, via teacher comments with next steps for students to improve the work. Further, although some feedback seen on students' work consisted of the teacher only circling portions of the rubric, with no explicit next steps for the student to build on the level of mastery attained, several of the students interviewed were able to clearly specify what they needed to do to improve their work based on the teacher feedback written on the work displayed. In commenting on teacher feedback, one student pointed to a rubric attached to her work and said, “As you can see, my teacher gave me a score of 3 out of 4 because I included reasons and evidence.”

- School leaders and staff use common assessments to measure student progress. Teachers across all grades administer pre- and post-writing performance tasks, unit tests, and quizzes. Teachers support students in the classroom based on assessment results. For example, analysis of a writing assessment revealed that students were not showing progress in writing short responses. This data led to a focus on regrouping students. Teachers use common assessments to form flexible groups and provide feedback to students regarding achievement. Students’ independent reading levels are assessed three times a year. In between each formal assessment, informal benchmark assessments are administered to students who are performing on and below grade level. Students are grouped according to their levels and abilities. Groups that will receive Academic Intervention Services are adjusted throughout the year using information from common assessments.

- Teacher-created benchmark assessments in ELA and math are aligned to the State Learning Standards. These assessments provide content-specific measurement of student achievement regarding strategies and concepts resulting in ongoing adjustments to instructional practices and development of feedback that promotes student awareness of next steps to improve their learning. Other assessments, including school-designed pre- and post-unit assessments across all content areas provide teachers with additional data to inform adjustments to meet students’ needs. As teachers look at these results, they hold data talks via the teacher team meetings to identify instructional trends which inform action plans used to develop purposeful learning groups to ensure meeting all student’s learning needs.
Findings
The principal has established a distributed leadership structure that ensures the vast majority of staff engages in ongoing grade-level and content area inquiry-based teacher professional collaborations.

Impact
Through teamwork, teachers regularly reflect on their pedagogy and contribute to key decisions aimed at improving teacher capacity and student outcomes across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal firmly believes that teachers need to collaborate and therefore teachers’ schedules provide an opportunity for them to meet in grade teams and use the time to focus on the schoolwide goal of student engagement and improving achievement. Teachers meet regularly in grade- and content-specific teams and use collaboratively-developed protocols to analyze curricula and student work, engage in shared reflection, and develop action plans to address the next steps. For example, during the observed teacher team meeting the facilitator took notes and opened up discussion about data for students. Math teachers decided that more work was needed with arithmetic operations. Additionally, teachers stated that they need to expose students to the pressures of the standardized test.

- A distributed leadership structure is embedded in the school culture and high expectations. Teachers serve as advisors and mentors who plan and lead professional development, lead grade and discipline teams, set up intervisitation schedules, host model-lesson classrooms, and engage in a variety of other roles as needed. Furthermore, teacher leaders assume a leadership role in supporting colleagues in instructional decisions that impact curriculum development. Teacher leaders meet with the principal during scheduled meetings to discuss instructional observations, suggest professional development and next steps for teachers. Teachers affirmed that they have a voice in instructional decisions and serve as facilitators during meetings to assist in the process of providing feedback to their colleagues around lesson planning.

- Teachers indicated that, with peers serving in roles such as grade leaders and instructional leads their voice is represented in decisions about schoolwide protocols, curricula and instructional initiatives. The teacher leaders collaborate regularly with school leaders to help select instructional resources as well as design and implement professional learning activities. One teacher leader noted that peer leaders are responsible for leading staff in analyzing school data and using the information to identify and address school needs and learning goals. Further, teachers within teams have designated leadership roles such as creating agendas, leading presentations at meetings and documenting team meeting activities as part of feedback loops that keep school leaders and peers informed about team decisions and activities across the school.