

Quality Review Report

2016-2017

M.S. 302 Luisa Dessus Cruz

Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 08X302

**681 Kelly St.
Bronx
NY 10455**

Principal: Liza Ortiz

**Dates of Review:
March 23, 2017 - March 24, 2017**

Lead Reviewer: Carlos Perez

The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

M.S. 302 Luisa Dessus Cruz 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

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	Rating
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	Area of Celebration	Well Developed
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Area of Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Finding	Proficient

School Quality Ratings continued

School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	Rating
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults	Additional Finding	Proficient
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Finding	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area	Rating
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	Additional Finding	Well Developed
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	Additional Finding	Proficient
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection	Additional Finding	Proficient
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Finding	Proficient
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 the CCLS	Additional Finding	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All curriculum is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the school has strategically integrated instructional shifts, allowing for coherence and fluency. Rigor and higher-order thinking are emphasized throughout for all learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Impact

Curricula expose students to all aspects of college and career readiness and allow all students to demonstrate their thinking regularly.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participate in lesson plan clinics that help to create coherence and alignment across the curricula. Consultants and peer instructional coaches provide teachers with specific feedback that is based on best practices and student results. As a result of this, teachers shared that they have seen improvement in their pedagogical practices and in student learning. Teachers find extreme value in not only getting feedback from administrators, but in getting feedback from the consultant and their peers. This varied feedback and collaboration is another way in which coherence is built, not only for curriculum but in instructional practices as well.
- Rigor and higher-order thinking skills for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are key areas of focus throughout the school. All students with disabilities and ELLs are immersed in the curriculum and guided, in regard to the former, by each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Support for all students is found in many ways. Teacher's video record their lessons and place them on the teacher and school's web page so students can revisit the lesson while they are home doing their homework. Students shared that this helps them answer questions they may have when they are working at home. Multiple entry points for students also come in the form of paraprofessionals found throughout the school, including bilingual paraprofessionals. Every paraprofessional has gone through master teacher support training to help offer students the same support given to them by their teachers. This training is not only given to the permanent paraprofessionals; substitute paraprofessionals are offered the same training as well. Paraprofessionals are held to the same high standards as teachers.
- This year the school made specific adjustments to ensure that instructional shifts, such as content knowledge for English Language Arts (ELA) and conceptual understanding for math, were primary areas of focus. For math lessons, planning included the use of the success criteria which ensures that students can identify the formula, identify the dimensions, and substitute and solve. Planning such as this is a deliberate consideration of how performers will convince the teacher that they have developed a deep understanding of the concept. For ELA lessons, students are gaining strong content knowledge through focusing on evidence from texts and the use of literary devices. One lesson asks students to identify the central idea from an excerpt and to use two details from the story to support their responses. In a science lesson, the teachers used an article on the digestive system and provided ample opportunities for students to discuss their thinking. The final product was a poster revealing different ways students were able to display their knowledge of the subject.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to the curriculum and reflect the school's belief that students learn best when engaged in regular discourse with their peers. Students are offered a variety of entry points that allows them to access the curricula in a number of ways.

Impact

All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are appropriately challenged and actively engaged, producing meaningful student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers shared the schoolwide belief about how students learn best: "explicit teaching, discourse with peers about content, and by teachers having a pulse of the class and using questioning to adjust instruction." Content is modeled for students, and there are opportunities for students to engage in partner turn and talks and group discussions, allowing them to express a deep understanding of the content on a regular basis. During an ELA lesson, students had opportunities to engage in think-pair-share activities to answer the question, "Why did your parents or your grandparents or even great grandparents come to the USA?" Student responses included, "They came for freedom," "To start fresh," and "My parents came to the US to have a better job." Examples of students being engaged in group and partner discussions were seen in some of the classrooms visited but not across many classes.
- During a science lesson, there were several entry points that allowed all students access to the lesson. Students were given handouts in Spanish, translated anchor charts, and visual supports such as pictures, and models. During an ELA lesson, ELL students were given additional support by having the literal meaning of words provided by a paraprofessional and the classroom teacher. A math lesson included various scaffolds and examples of differentiation. Students were grouped in such a manner that allowed for language support through peers as evidenced by students helping other students translate in their native language. Guided notes and color copies of the lesson's PowerPoint were made available for not only ELL students, but for all students. In addition, online technology resources, such as iReady and Edmodo, were also available to students.
- During an ELA class, students had opportunities to engage in turn and talk sessions that allowed them to share their thinking. For example, students were asked to turn and talk to answer the question, "What is the poet trying to say about the girl when they write *her thoughts are like golden birds*?" Students could be heard saying, "I think it is a metaphor" and "her thoughts are important to her but they can quickly fly out of her." During a science class about the digestive system, students were active participants throughout the lesson, sharing their thinking, engaging in partner discussions, and actively asking questions. However, this type of full engagement and student participation was not viewed throughout all lessons.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers use rubrics and assessments that are aligned to the school's curricula. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices reflect ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

School leaders and faculty have a clear portrait of student progress towards goals throughout grade levels and subjects. Teacher feedback to students is actionable and timely and offers teachers opportunities to adjust lessons as needed.

Supporting Evidence

- When meeting with students, they were able to clearly explain what feedback was and how it helps them. One student shared how their teacher has a motto called "BS"-- be specific." Consequently, students say that there is no confusion when they are reading their feedback. Other students shared how they use teacher feedback when revising writing assignments when they resubmit their work or in future assignments. Another student shared how the class recently reviewed a math assignment where the teacher's feedback included how the student needed to explain answers in greater depth. The student is already thinking about the next assignment and how to explain answers more fully.
- During a math lesson, the teacher used a variety of ways to check for understanding. As students were engaged in group discussions, the teacher could be seen circulating around the room and listening to each group, using a checklist to document what he heard from students. The teacher asked students to share out what their groups discussed and then allowed students to select the next student to share with the class. The teacher called on students that both raised their hands and those that didn't. During an ELA class that was centered on the use of analogies, the teacher posed the question, "Why do you think the author chose an orange instead of a different fruit?" and asked students to then turn and talk. One response was, "Because they use oranges for energy and when people get up in the morning they don't have energy." Another student noted how the orange is a fruit that many people have for breakfast and, since it was the morning, that is why the author may have used an orange and not another fruit.
- In ELA, teachers are guided by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's (TCRWP) progressions. Science and social studies rubrics are created using the TCRWP rubrics as the foundation. For math, teachers create rubrics around conceptual understandings and have increased the number of manipulatives that are used in math classes. Evidence of the use of rubrics was found throughout the classes visited as was student comprehension of what a rubric is and how it helps them. Students were able to articulate clearly that a rubric is a tool that "helps you get the highest grade possible." Other students shared how the rubrics are useful in their ELA classes because the teacher can circle the areas they need to work on and it is easy for them to see those areas.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff, students, and parents that produces accountability for continuous student progress.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations for the entire school community help to provide a path for college and career readiness, including an advisory program, college trips, and extensive sharing by teachers of their own college experiences.

Supporting Evidence

- High expectations are communicated to staff and students as early as the first day of school. For staff, this is done through the dissemination of the staff handbook, which clearly outlines all expectations and protocols. In addition, there are handbooks for ELA and science that encompass a multitude of areas for teachers and support staff. For example, both the ELA and science handbooks are divided into three sections. Section one encompasses non-negotiable areas such as beliefs about how students learn best, the learning environment, the school grading policy, and how to organize student work. Section two includes areas such as lesson planning, levels for English language acquisition, and explicit instruction and modeling. Section three focuses on assessment and includes areas such as analyzing student data and information about iReady and myON (for ELA). Page three of the staff handbook spells out clear expectations of how students learn best, which is through explicit teacher modeling. The handbooks go on to state that children learn best when they are "presented with appropriately challenging content that is differentiated to accommodate student interest, learning styles, and ability levels." Copies of these handbooks are shared with parents in an effort to provide families with support to help their children meet schoolwide expectations.
- High expectations for college and career readiness are communicated to students throughout the school year. All eighth grade students take part in the College 101 program which culminates with a trip to the University of Connecticut and Yale University. Students shared their experiences in the College 101 program including how they had an opportunity to write a letter to the college or university they hope to attend in the future. These letters included experiences from the students' lives which made them think about college and decide upon a particular school to attend. In addition to college exposure, the school supports students through the high school selection process, most notably through its advisory program. This program allows students to set and monitor individual goals associated with the selection of their high school of choice. Students shared that having the opportunity through advisory helps them to focus on what they need to do in order to have every chance possible to get into their number one choices. Parents are also supported in this process through a number of workshops dedicated to high school selection and college and careers.
- Expectations regarding college and careers extends through all subject areas. In ELA classes, students take part in a writing assignment where students share what college they would like to attend and what it takes to one day be a successful college student. In addition, there are bulletin boards throughout the school where teachers post the colleges they attended and use this to engage students in conversations about their schools.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teacher pedagogical practice is supported through a frequent cycle of teacher observations. Verbal and written feedback from school leaders captures teacher strengths and detailed next steps.

Impact

Teacher feedback from school leaders articulates clear expectations connected to teacher practice and supports the development of all teachers.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a formal observation process of which all teachers are fully aware. Once teachers have selected their observation preferences, a memo from the principal goes out to all building leaders that indicates which teachers they should be targeting and the number of observations that each building leader should be scheduling for the school year. Cabinet meetings at the beginning of the school year are used to discuss the observation process to norm mutual observations, discuss any pedagogical concerns, and ensure that building leaders do not schedule observations for the same teachers at any given time. Following each observation, a detailed meeting takes place between the teacher and the observer that allows teachers to be reflective in their practice and, along with school leaders, to develop next steps.
- Feedback to teachers captures strengths and areas of growth. In an observation report to a teacher, the school leader begins by sharing with the teacher how he enjoyed seeing the implementation of the reading marathon and how engaged students were. The school leader highlighted how the students were able to make a smooth transition from independent reading into the mini-lesson. The school leader reminded the teacher that the instructional focus this year was building content knowledge in order to guide student learning through a variety of pedagogical approaches. An additional observation report offered feedback to the teacher that targeted the teacher's content knowledge, pedagogical practice, and assessment procedures. After this lesson, the building leader suggested to the teacher that while conferencing with students, he should consider jotting down what students are discussing and take notes on areas in which the students might need additional support. Subsequently, the teacher should either address students about these issues that same day or work with identified students the following day, either in small groups or in station work.
- Teachers are offered support that helps their pedagogical development through a variety of ways. There are teacher leaders for each grade, and all new teachers have a mentor. There is an assistant principal assigned to each grade level that also supports teachers through the formal and informal observations process. Teachers feel that the open-door policy that the administration advocates and has instituted allows for productive meetings between teachers and school leaders. Teachers believe that this has set the tone for the building and, as a result, teachers from all grades and subject areas "come together to support each other regardless of their department or subject." Teachers also have the ability to select and develop their own professional learning opportunities that are aligned to their personal goals. This year, teachers developed a survey related to professional development (PD) and used the results to work with school leaders to offer PD aligned to their individual goals.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The leadership capacity of teachers is supported and built as a result of the distributed leadership practices that are in place. Frequent opportunities to engage in collaboration allows teachers to share content knowledge and best pedagogical practices for improving teaching and learning.

Impact

Pedagogical practices are resulting in improvement in student learning. Furthermore, having teachers engage in distributed leadership positively influences student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have several opportunities to take on leadership roles. The school has Peer Collaborative Teachers that helps to lead and support specific grades and subjects. One teacher shared her experiences in taking on this leadership role with the seventh grade math department and how impactful it has been. It enhanced to her communication and collaboration skills. In addition, teachers act as peer instructional coaches to provide guidance and leadership during team meetings, lesson planning clinics, and periodic classroom intervisitation. Many teachers expressed how these opportunities have helped and supported their growth as educators, and they cite these as main reasons they have seen improvement in student learning over the past few years.
- Teachers review student data on a three-week cycle. Student data reviewed includes student work samples, pre-and post-assessments, simulations, and data pulled from iReady. In addition, teachers meet every day to not only look at consistencies in each of the units of study, but to also discuss best practices and what instructional changes or additions need to be made in order to deliver the best possible instruction to students. As a result of teacher collaboration, teachers feel that they are supported and have grown professionally. Teachers strongly feel that regular interaction with their colleagues and, furthermore, engaging in intervisitation with their peers, allow for multiple opportunities to discuss and reflect on their instructional practices. Improving their practice to benefit their students is the teachers' top priority. One teacher shared the following: "We are a family that all work together and collaborate together, regardless of what we teach or what grade we cover. We don't have an ego. The most important thing is the students, and I think we all truly believe that."
- Teachers are continuously attending outside professional development and are expected to turn-key their learning to the peers. Teachers shared how recently some of them attended professional learning at the New York City Writing Project on how to implement free writing across the curricula. Teachers from all subject areas shared how impactful it was to learn from their colleagues the various ways to implement writing in their classes and curriculum. One teacher stated, "I find myself making sure that my kids are writing almost every day." Teachers also create and implement their own workshops based on their needs and the needs of their students. For example, teachers shared how gender understanding was an area both students and teachers expressed a desire to learn more about. As a result, teachers created and implemented workshops for both teachers and students on gender diversity and equality.