NYC **Department of Education**
Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Report

2017-2018

M.S. 839

Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 15K839

713 Caton Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11218

Principal: Michael Perlberg

Dates of Review:
March 14, 2018 - March 15, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Rosemary Stuart

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. 839 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		
To what extent does the school...	**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

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

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

Findings

School leaders ensure teachers implement standards-aligned Expeditionary Learning curricula emphasizing rigorous tasks across all grades and content areas.

Impact

College and career readiness skills are coherently promoted and all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs), demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders adopted the Expeditionary Learning curricula to incorporate inquiry-based, interdisciplinary lessons into units of study, or expeditions. They ensure the standards, targets, and assessments are coherent across grades and content areas and strategically incorporate instructional shifts to meet their expectations through observation and involvement in the planning and revisions process. The principal and assistant principal work directly with the departments to ensure consistently rigorous lessons are planned. Lesson plans consistently reference learning targets that are written in language that is accessible to students. For example, a learning target addressing the Common Core Learning Standards for sixth grade literacy reads, "I can use relevant evidence and compelling reasoning to develop a complex claim about environmental stewardship in the United States." Another reads, "I can write and solve equations that represent real life situations." Students choose from a wide variety of elective courses each semester to explore topics such as robotics, photography, fitness, spoken word, and chess. Teachers incorporate at least one integrated project per year into their curricula. A parent noted that these interdisciplinary lessons have led to her child thinking more critically.

- There is a coherent emphasis on creating units of study that stem "from local, contextualized case studies" and focus on conceptual understanding rather than formulaic processes. Teachers plan lessons to engage students in current events and real-world situations. A reading lesson focused on the college campus unrest during the Vietnam War and made connections to the current student walk-outs protesting gun violence at schools across the nation, including this one. The lesson plan includes an article from the Los Angeles Times, "East L.A., 1968: 'Walkout!' The day high school students helped ignite the Chicano power movement." The lesson plan outlines guided notetaking supports for ELLs. A science lesson plan will task students with making a three-dimensional model of a bioswale based on a study of the environmental cleanup of the nearby Gowanus Canal.

- A lesson plan on geometric designs inspired by world cultures outlines instructional strategies for each student in the Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class. For example, the plan indicates that one student needs reminders to stay on task, other students work better with graphic organizers or positive reinforcement, and several students are required to have extended time for tasks and assessments. Another lesson plan includes two versions of the notecatcher, one that asks students to revise their claim, and another that reminds students to use strong verbs and provides sentence starters to prompt the revision.

Quality Indicator:	**1.2 Pedagogy**	**Rating:**	**Proficient**

Findings

Teaching strategies emphasize productive struggle and exploration in work products and discussions and consistently provide access to the curricula for all students.

Impact

All students engage in challenging tasks and demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation; however, they do not currently reflect consistent levels of ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Some teachers provide tasks that require students to struggle as they work to find the correct strategy. This instructional model was observed in a math lesson in which students were challenged with drawing irregular polygons with rulers and protractors. The directions on the task reminded students, "It is okay to make mistakes! More than 1 attempt is expected." One student expressed frustration while trying to construct a polygon with given angle measurements as he accepted assistance from a peer. Many teachers provide opportunities for student-to-student discussion. For example, in a French language lesson, small groups of students read information about public buildings and places, such as hospitals and schools, and interpreted the clues at one gallery station to determine their next station.

- Most, but not all, teachers provide structures to ensure consistent participation in class or student-to-student discussion. In one class, students brainstormed with partners and then shared their ideas about the difference between on-demand writing and homework with the whole class. Students made the distinction of timed versus untimed and suggested that an assignment completed for homework would be expected to have more details. In another class, while students in small groups were actively discussing a planned walkout, a group of three students was disengaged, with little facilitation to ensure high levels of discourse. In another class, students waited for the teacher to confirm they were ready before moving on to the next task, illustrating a similar lapse in ownership of learning.

- In some classes, teachers controlled the pacing of the instruction and the work periods by using timers and routines that reinforce the management skills students need to learn if they are to take ownership of their learning. In a math lesson, the teacher used a countdown clock on the interactive white board to note the time allowed for them to revise their work. The teacher awarded stamps to students who completed partner or group work efficiently. Instruction in most classes began with the teacher unpacking the learning target before proceeding to students engaging in the activities.

- Most teachers present challenging and rigorous tasks requiring extended writing or the demonstration of speaking skills. A student wrote an essay about cyber-bullying and described the online harassment that female gamers often face from male gamers. She cited a male gamer who protested the involvement of females and refused to partner with them by writing, "We are going to lose. We have a girl on our team." In one class, groups of students prepared podcasts on topics such as the animal rights movement and gun violence. In a math class, students discussed the difference between an equation and an expression. One pair of students set up an equation representing two-thirds the number of cookies baked and debated whether it is possible to bake less than a whole cookie.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Assessment practices and grades based on trends in performance are aligned to the Expeditionary Learning targets. Teachers administer common assessments and track student progress toward goals.

Impact

Actionable feedback to students guides them in taking steps to improve their performance and achievement. Teachers use the results of assessments to adjust curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers implement a standards-based grading policy that gives more weight to the trend in performance and thus to the more recent work the students produce. Students and parents are informed of this policy, and the online grade reporting system, JumpRope, is aligned to the learning targets for each expedition and is programmed to calculate the scores. Teachers convert the leveled standards-based grade into a conventional 100-point scale for report cards that are more familiar to high schools. Letters to parents provide extensive information on the conversion process.

- Feedback to a student on an essay regarding online discrimination identified the qualities the writer exhibited according to a detailed rubric, awarded the students level three on some qualities, such as grade appropriate command of conventions, and level two for literal comprehension of the text. The teacher recommended that another student "use at least two sentences of explanation for each piece of text evidence." Teachers celebrated the progress seventh-grade students made from baseline to mid-unit to final argumentative assays. Feedback to one student on the mid-unit assessment highlighted a claim the student wrote about hiring discrimination based on race or religion and noted "This is an excellent point, but it should either be developed more or not included."

- Expectations for students are laid out explicitly in the Wings rubric, which includes sections on managing responsibilities, communicating and working effectively, and identifying academic strengths and challenges. Students are given feedback on their Wings progress along with feedback on their assignments. Students understand they are graded on their academic performance as well as how well they progress in mastering skills.

- Teachers administer the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment to all students three times a year. They use the results of the analyses of these assessments to adjust curricula and instructional practices. Data for all sub-groups of students in grade eight, the students who have been at the school since it was founded, show more than the eight unit increase that would be expected from 2015 to 2017. Students with disabilities increased their performance by 11 units, and ELLs increased by nine units. Analyses of State tests in math and English Language Arts (ELA) show similar improvements for all students and for sub groups as well. By analyzing data even further, teachers noticed that Black male students were not performing at the same levels as other sub-groups, which led to revising units of study to incorporate topics and texts aligned to schoolwide equity goals.

Quality Indicator:	**3.4 High Expectations**	**Rating:**	**Well Developed**

Findings

School leaders, teachers, and parents use the High Quality Work (HQW) protocol to effectively communicate expectations for college and career readiness and establish a culture with high expectations for all students.

Impact

The school community supports students with guidance and advisement as they make progress toward meeting expectations and successfully partners with families to prepare their children for success in high school.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents have been partners in the development of the school from its inception. They participate in examining the quality of student work and in determining what the expectations for student achievement should be through the HQW protocol. Twice each year, parents, students, and teachers discuss the "complexity, craftmanship, and authenticity" they strive to achieve in student work. Then they examine work that students choose to display for these qualities. Feedback from the parents informs curricular and programmatic decisions. After the most recent HQW, one parent commented, "It makes me think that MS 839 students are being prepared to make a real difference in the world." Other suggestions included incorporating more multi-media projects into the curriculum and one parent asked, "Is there room for grammar…amongst all the other things you ask students to do?"

- Parents receive information about the progress their children are making through regular progress reports. The parent newsletter in October explained how to interpret the DRP scores and outlined the purpose of the assessment. This newsletter also had information about scheduling upcoming student-led conferences (SLCs). Information to parents explains that SLCs are conducted in the midpoint between the HQW sessions. At these conferences, students share work that represents their highest achievement. Students review what is expected of them and prepare for the conferences in their crew classes. A parent stated that the SLCs help her to understand what her child is learning and what is expected of all of the students at the school.

- Through the Expeditionary Learning crew classes, teachers structure activities to prepare students to acquire the skills they will need to be successful in high school and adult life. Students in seventh-grade crews visited high schools to interview high school seniors about student life at their schools. Before the event, students prepared questions and practiced interviewing skills, such as making eye contact, taking notes, and listening. Students in an eighth-grade crew class explored the high school admissions process by becoming familiar with the application and identifying schools that would be "reaches, matches, or targets" based on their transcripts. The students created to-do lists that included recording their seventh-grade test scores and grades, which are often criteria for high school admissions to screened programs. Students agreed that they could talk to their crew advisors and receive guidance about academic and personal issues.

- Although this school has not had a cohort of students move on to high school yet, current eighth-graders have gone through the high school application process. Almost half of them received offers to screened or specialized high schools. The percentage of students at this school who met State standards on math and ELA tests exceeds the citywide averages and 99 percent of students pass their math, English, social studies, and science classes.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

School leaders provide effective feedback from customized cycles of observation, based on the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, which accurately captures teachers' strengths and areas for growth.

Impact

Teachers reflect on their professional growth using online journals. Feedback from school leaders supports teacher development.

Supporting Evidence

- The cycle of observation of teachers is determined by the supervision of the department in which they teach. The principal supervises the humanities, foreign language, and physical education departments while the assistant principal works with math, science. and the arts departments. The school leaders jointly conduct observations at the beginning of the year to norm their ratings and develop a common understanding of instructional expectations. Feedback is given to teachers immediately, sometimes within a few hours, and includes low-inference evidence aligned to the components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- Teachers keep journals to reflect on their instructional practices and student work outcomes, to plan goals for the year, and to document what they learn from professional collaborations, intervisitations, coaching, and professional development sessions. These digital journals are saved in an online document sharing platform and administrators have access to them. A new teacher stated that these journals were a good way to manage short-term goal setting and added, "I was able to identify things I wanted to address directly."

- School leaders provide teachers with feedback to help them recognize their achievement and encourage them to reflect on the areas of their practice that they find challenging. Feedback to one teacher lauded the efforts made to meet students' needs through the use of flexible grouping strategies. Additional comments questioned whether the teacher had worked with the grade team to explore ways to make group work time more productive. Another observation report included analyses of student work and discussion in a math class. The teacher, who was rated highly effective in engaging students in learning, was commended for providing an environment where students were eager to share their problem-solving strategies. As a next step, the teacher was asked to consider ways to provide additional support for students who struggle with moving from identifying a pattern to creating an algebraic rule. After a class visit by a school leader, a teacher received feedback in an email that urged him to engage students in higher-order questions and to think about ways "to assess their level of understanding."

Additional Finding

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

Findings

All teachers engage in structured inquiry-based collaborations and staff crews to analyze student work as well as professional performance.

Impact

The implementation of Expeditionary Learning practices improves the instructional capacity of teachers and groups of students make progress toward goals.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet regularly in teams focusing on implementation of the Expeditionary Learning curricula and developing coherent assessments. They meet in teams by grade and by department to build consistent curricula and assessments and to focus on the needs of individuals and groups of students. Grade-level teams include special education teachers and paraprofessionals. A paraprofessional said that working together with teachers on these teams "helps us to help our students with the content." This focus on improving instruction and assessment addresses the schoolwide goal of mastery of knowledge and skills.

- Similar to the organization of students into crews, teachers also utilize crew meetings to reflect on their professional growth, discuss issues facing the community, and "model the supportive environment we want all of [the] student crews to be." One teacher described her interactions with colleagues and the importance of collectively developing curricula and assessments, stating "This is the most collaborative school, now I understand the power of co-teaching."

- A teacher inquiry team analyzed student work by sorting exit slips from a seventh-grade humanities class into categories of performance on a spectrum of non-responsive to fully addressing all elements of the task and making connections to figurative language. The teachers documented their discussions and decisions online to be shared with each other and with school administrators. They determined that they would identify students who would benefit from peer tutoring. Online curricular documents show the revisions that have been made over time to address issues uncovered by inquiry processes. For example, the writing scope and sequence for grades six, seven, and eight indicates that as skills are mastered in one grade, they will be embedded into the learning experiences in subsequent years.