Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement

Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 11X468

2441 Wallace Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467

Principal: Anthony Rivera

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

Lead Reviewer: Jorge Estrella

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

Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement 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**	**Well Developed**
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 and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Rigor is embedded in curricula across grades and subjects so that student-learning experiences are deepened by engaging students in academic tasks connected to real-world situations.

Impact

All students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, are engaged in coherent curricula across grades and subjects that consistently challenge them to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across content areas, teachers designed rigorous and engaging instructional planning documents aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, which integrate the instructional shifts and vertically aligned learning experiences by making purposeful decisions that emphasize student engagement via challenging curricula. Lesson plans include the use of the workshop model where learning objectives are strategically connected to the Common Core. In a grade eight social studies lesson plan students are challenged to cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources and solving multi-step math problems. In a seventh grade English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plan, students will cite several pieces of textual evidence to support the analysis of their assigned story. As a result of these strategic and purposeful planning of units and lessons, students take part in a coherent curriculum across grades that prepares them for the challenges of college and career.

- Instructional planning documents reflect lessons and academic tasks to engage students with an emphasis on rigorous habits, such as productive conversations dependent on complex text, using evidence from multiple written sources to inform or make an argument, building academic vocabulary needed to access grade level complex texts, and thinking independently, all of which are embedded in academic tasks that properly challenge all students, including students with disabilities and ELLs. In a seventh grade social studies lesson students will be asked to write an argumentative essay comparing and contrasting Paleolithic and Neolithic Eras. In math students will use odd/even number properties and divisibility rules to solve real-world mathematical problems. In ELA students will write an analysis essay that requires them to explain how a character changes and/or matures throughout the course of a novel. As a result, all students are immersed in cognitively challenging academic tasks that use several paths to promote learning and extend student thinking.

- To promote higher-order thinking skills and relevance in the curricula, teachers planned tasks where students have to apply learned skills into projects. This was evident in the creation of a dream home, where students draw the floor plan following specific parameters indicated on a rubric for the distribution of each room, as well as the size of the appliances and furniture. Then, students have a choice for presentation of their project to the class, which must indicate an understanding of mathematical concepts used to plan their dream home. In social studies, students will use primary and secondary sources to analyze the events surrounding the outcome of the Civil War. To address the needs of ELLs and students with disabilities for this task, supports such as the development of vocabulary, visuals, sentence starters, graphic organizers, among others are included in the lesson plan. As a result, all students are better equipped to complete rigorous tasks.

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

Findings

Teaching practices provide instructional supports, including questioning and discussion techniques that engage students in appropriately challenging tasks and discussions. However, the strategic delivery of multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions for all learners varies across the school.

Impact

Although most students are engaged in meaningful discussions and provided with opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills, a push to further critical thinking skills, and student ownership of learning has yet to reach the vast majority of classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers were observed using multiple entry points and scaffolds such as leveled tasks, graphic organizers, sentence starters, visual aids, and one-on-one conferences to support all students including ELLs and students with disabilities so that learners can access instructional materials and produce meaningful work products. In a social studies lesson, students have access to three different texts based on their specific needs. In an ELA class with ELLs, the English as a New Language teacher provided one-one-one support to newcomers using visuals, vocabulary development, and Total Physical Response strategies, addressing not only the content but language acquisition as well. While in most classes teachers planned lessons with supports to engage a diversity of students in rigorous academic tasks, the vast majority of teachers are not delivering these effectively during instruction.

- Across classrooms visited, students actively participated in classroom discussions. In a seventh grade social studies class, students were engaged in whole class, small group, and peer discussions in conversations about how Europeans and Native Americans share different perspectives on the same topic. Students were engaged in rich conversations, using accountable talk stems, and the use of notes taken from a video clip, as well as leveled text provided to ELLs and students with disabilities. In addition, all students were making connections and comparisons to modern day acquisition of land ownership. However, this effective practice of engaging students in meaningful discussion and making connections/comparisons of historical events to current life has yet to be implemented in some classrooms, hindering opportunities for some students to make their thinking visible and take ownership of their work.

- In a sixth grade social studies class, students were engaged in a discussion around Paleolithic and Neolithic Eras. The class was divided into two groups and members of each group had to sustain their arguments based on textual evidence. Students were observed using accountable talk stems. This level of engagement was also observed in another social studies class and in a grade seven ELA class where all students were demonstrating high levels of participation according to their ability levels. In some classes a teacher-led approach to questioning did not promote discussions or allow students enough time to process their answers, thus hindering the opportunity for all students to participate fully in class discussions and take ownership of learning.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curricula. Assessment practices consistently reflect the use of a variety of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment to make adjustments to lessons.

Impact

Teachers use rubrics to provide students with actionable feedback so that students are able to articulate their next learning steps. The use of ongoing checks for understanding results in effective on-the-spot instructional adjustments for most classes.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and students shared that across all content areas teachers use Common Core-aligned rubrics to support student understanding of what they are expected to accomplish in their essays, tasks, and projects. An eighth grade ELA presentation rubric guides students toward a clear explanation of ideas and information, organization, as well as how eyes, body, and voice impact delivery. A seventh grade short response rubric includes, answer, evidence, analysis, transitions and conventions. An eighth grade mind map math rubric includes content/elements, content/purpose, and graphics/visuals. Teachers use these rubrics to ensure that students have a clear understanding of the different elements they should take into consideration to complete their assignments, as well as for grading and providing actionable feedback to students. Students are able to use the rubrics to articulate why they received certain grades and explain the areas in which they need to improve.

- During the meeting with students, most students were able to articulate what they need to work on to improve their grades. Students' work presented shows the following feedback: "The panels are clear and sequential. You demonstrated an understanding of how matter changes phases and attempted to use vocabulary accurately. Next time, revise for spelling. Also, review your notes for the phase changes. Does it melt at zero degree centigrade? And describe deposition. There were some inconsistencies in the details," and "Great story, you had amazing details in your writing. Next time, I want you to work on breaking your ideas up to write simpler and check your spelling and punctuation." Students also shared that teachers offered verbal feedback during class, but also made themselves available during lunch time or after school for further support.

- Across classrooms visited, teachers were observed using different approaches to check for understanding, as well as provide opportunities for student self-assessment. Teachers used hand signals, thumbs up/thumbs down, and questioning techniques to check for understanding. Teachers also conferred with students, and provided verbal feedback. For student self-assessment teachers provided exit tickets, rubrics, checklists and opportunities for reflection using rubrics. For example, on a reflection sheet a student wrote "believe in myself more and be more confident in myself, look back at my notes and ask for help if needed and share what is on my mind during class because it may be helpful."

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations, including elements of Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, to the entire staff. School leaders and teachers partner with families to support student progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact

Time during the summer to articulate high expectations to faculty and ongoing professional development (PD) has resulted in defined structures of mutual accountability. In addition, families are provided with clear expectations in order to provide support to their children to further progress toward achievement and a path for college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all members of the school community, through discussions at regular teacher meetings, during summer three-day orientation sessions, and during ongoing PD sessions. High expectations are clearly delineated in the faculty handbook, which lays out in detail the instructional expectations grounded in the Danielson Framework for Teaching, PD, school culture, norms and regulations, and logistics. At the beginning of the school year teachers unpack to understand and internalize key elements of the faculty handbook.

- School leaders ensure that ongoing PD sessions for instructional components of the Danielson Framework for Teaching deepen teachers' understanding of quality instruction, grounded in the school's instructional focus of "student engagement," as well as planning effective instruction and assessments. School leaders hold teachers' accountable for these expectations by conducting frequent cycles of teacher observations and providing actionable feedback. PD sessions also promote accountability through the completion of surveys at the end of a session. For example, after a team teaching workshop, teachers completed a survey answering the following questions, "When do you anticipate implementing the alternative teaching model? What period? I would identify my experience with One Teach/One Assist as, I still have questions about, I would like to learn more about, and I would just like to add." These structures result in a culture of mutual accountability to provide quality PD as well as to implement new learning in classroom instruction.

- High expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness are communicated to all students through the rigorous curriculum, academic and behavioral expectations, executive skills classes, college readiness courses for all seventh graders, and Regents courses for eighth graders. In addition, students' shared that tours to colleges and high schools, as well as a college day and a career day are programmed each school year. Staff consistently communicate high expectations and student progress to families via email, phone calls, in-person meetings, and individualized sessions during weekly parent engagement time. In addition, parents shared that they have access to and received training on how to use the online grading system. Parents added that the family handbook also informs them of different ways they can partner with teachers to support their children at home. Furthermore, during the curriculum night session, parents learned about academic expectations and the Common Core-aligned curricula for each content area.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

School leaders provide actionable feedback to teachers that accurately captures strengths, challenges, and next steps aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and provide targeted support to new teachers via mentoring, intervisitations, and one-on-one support.

Impact

School leaders use the observation process, analysis of student work, and focused feedback, to communicate clear expectations that support teacher development and practice.

Supporting Evidence

- Observation reports reviewed reflect that school leaders offer teachers specific and actionable feedback on areas of strength, and areas in need of improvement that are aligned the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, along with recommendations for next steps. One report indicated that during the post-observation conference, the school leader discussed the lack of opportunities for students to work independently with the teacher. A suggestion from the school leader included to give students time for independent work and then have them self-assess or have peers assess the work, then discuss. Another example of written feedback states, "There were two very clear opportunities to maximize student engagement that were missed. As discussed in our debrief, you can use the Lexile analyzer to get a quick sense of the level of text complexity then decide if it requires additional scaffolding. In looking at student annotations of the reading, it was clear that students were dealing with text that was way too complex. I will return to your class on the week of November 19th looking for implementation of this feedback."

- School leaders designed four-week cycles of frequent observations and provide timely, effective feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The observation process includes pre- and post-observation conferences. Student work produced during the lessons observed is referenced in the written feedback to teachers and during the post-conference. School leaders ensure that all new teachers are assigned a mentor and have time embedded into their schedule to meet with their mentor, visit the mentor's classroom, and have the mentor observe their classroom for a total of three periods a week. During the weekly, period-long mentor meeting, mentors and mentees develop a coaching plan, create goals, develop a plan to attain those goals, and evaluate their steps toward meeting those goals. New teachers shared that these supports have contributed to progressive improvement of the delivery of instruction, as well as the ability to build rapport with students.

- School leaders offer several opportunities for teachers to engage in PD to norm and deepen their understanding of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. In PD activities, teachers dive into the framework by noting on the rubric the specific differences between developing, effective and highly effective practices. Teachers are also engaged in cycles of intervisitations, using a Calibration Visit Protocol, where relevant evidence from the lesson is captured through the use of low-inference notes, student work, and connections to the components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* according to the focus identified for each teacher. After the visit all participants engage in professional conversation with the host teacher, which supports teacher development and practice. Furthermore, teachers establish goals during individual planning conferences and school leaders offer feedback in alignment and support of these goals throughout the school year, resulting in clear expectations for teacher practice.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

Teachers meet regularly to systematically analyze their instructional practices and develop strategies to collectively improve teachers' instructional capacity and student achievement. School leaders have embedded shared decision-making practices throughout the school.

Impact

Effective structures to analyze student work have resulted in shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for students, as well as allowed teachers to play an integral role in key schoolwide decisions that affect student learning via contributions to the PD plan and hiring practices, among others.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams analyze student work and data using a systematic approach to identify student strengths and gaps in learning. Each team was able to develop goals and implement research based strategies to target the learning according to student needs. The ELA team used the Degrees of Reading Power assessment to identify growth across all grades from the baseline to the benchmark assessment in connection to the target standard for the inquiry cycle. Across grades target standards reflect a 29 percentage point increase in mastery from baseline to benchmark and a 53 percentage point decrease in remediation. The team decided to implement strategies for fluency practice, more explicit comprehension instruction, vocabulary supports, and developed a rubric to determine students' ability to analyze textual evidence in short and extended response writing assignments. These strategies were observed in several classes visited where students demonstrated mastery of learning targets. Systemic analysis of data proved that there were improvements in common pedagogical practices and strategies being delivered across the school.

- The seventh grade math data analysis team notes revealed that teachers consistently use student data to determine gaps, misconceptions, and strengths. The student mastery report based on the mid-unit assessment, indicated that 25 percent of students' misconceptions are that they do not know how to relate the constant of proportionality in context or equations, and 30 percent of the students' misconceptions are that they do not understand what is meant by mph as meaning of 60 miles per one hour. Teachers planned targeted instruction to those students in an exploratory lesson by providing an equation and generating a table of values, then having students discuss what evidence can be provided to connect the equation and the table. Teachers shared that working with colleagues to analyze data has enhanced their repertoire of teaching strategies.

- Collaboration between school leaders and teachers led to key decisions relative to PD and the development of initiatives to support student achievement through improved instruction. The instructional cabinet includes teachers who provide feedback and recommendations on the development of schoolwide goals as well as engage in thoughtful collaboration on the design of the PD plan, which include teachers as facilitators. Grade Team Leaders, facilitate weekly grade teams, meet weekly and provide feedback and input on the process and state of instruction and culture. Teachers shared that they have opportunities to participate and have a voice in the hiring process and contribute to the design of the school's interview rubric. An interdisciplinary teacher team designed a tool for use by instructional groups to focus on reading and vocabulary development strategies to address the needs of ELLs, students with disabilities, and students in the lowest third across content areas. As a result, the New York State standardized assessments indicate that 59 percent of ELLs are making progress which is higher than the city and comparison group.