

# Quality Review Report

## 2019-2020

**BELL Academy**

**Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 25Q294**

**18-25 212 Street  
Queens  
NY 11360**

**Principal: David Abbott**

**Dates of Review:  
October 16, 2019 - October 17, 2019**

**Lead Reviewer: Daniel Kim**

# The Quality Review Report

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

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

## Information about the School

BELL Academy 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 State standards and/or content standards	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## 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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

### 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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Area of Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Finding</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations such as grade-specific inquiry teams and cross-grade department teams to systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including feedback practices and culturally responsive instruction planning.

### Impact

The work of teacher teams result in shared improvements in instructional practice, schoolwide coherence and increased student achievement for all learners, including students with disabilities and Multi-Lingual Learners (MLLs).

### Supporting Evidence

- Year-long notes and minutes from a cross-grade inquiry teacher team in the previous school year focused on improving the teacher practice of providing feedback to students. Artifacts from this teacher team include teacher self-evaluations on their feedback practices, as well as the creation of an assessment practices checklist for high quality feedback that articulates expectations for prioritized, specific, actionable qualities, as well as for method of delivery. Interviewed students across grades and content areas articulated the consistent use of checklists, rubrics, in-person conferences and other sources of feedback that leads to not only actionable but meaningful feedback that they can apply in multiple classes. There is evidence of such inquiry across the school, thus resulting in strengthening the capacity of teachers to self-assess their practices, which results in instructional coherence.
- All teachers across the school community systematically engage in three strategic cycles of inquiry within teacher teams, with the first cycle focusing on closing the achievement gap through social emotional learning and development. During the teacher team observation, grade seven teachers gathered to utilize the tuning protocol to examine lesson plans using the tenets for Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education, as part of the schoolwide goal to specifically support the academic performance of Hispanic students. Teachers analyzed a lesson plan for the Salem Witch Trials for various components of Culturally Responsive practice, including the use of diverse sources of texts and perspectives, as well as opportunities for students to make real-life connections between the work and their prior knowledge. Teachers discussed opportunities for making connections across similar events, as well as across cultures and backgrounds that reflect the diversity of students at the school so that they can engage in compare and contrast analysis discussions and applications to current events. Concrete next steps included teaching into vocabulary such as “witch hunt”, finding text sources from diverse perspectives, and banks of reflection questions around identifying causes of such events and the power of fear that drive collective actions.
- Such strategic teacher inquiry focused on instructional practices have led to a consistent growth in student achievement across multiple years as measured by the New York State (NYS) English Language Arts (ELA) tests. For example, 59 percent of students performed at level 3 or 4 in grade six, increasing to 79 percent by the same group of students performing at level 3 or 4 on grade eight tests. Such increased academic achievement was reflected in all subgroups, including students with disabilities and MLLs. This pattern of increased student achievement was echoed by a four year growth in the percentage of grade eight students earning high school credits, from 57 percent to 91 percent.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies such as the use of small group strategy instruction, tiered student work, content and discussion scaffolds, strategically provide multiple entry points and meaningful extensions for all learners. Student work products and discussions across the vast majority but not all classes reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

### Impact

A variety of learners, including students with disabilities are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across the vast majority of classes teaching strategies, such as small-group or independent instruction, tiered student work, visual, discussion and content scaffolds, provide multiple entry points for a variety of learners to challenging work and student-to-student discussions. For example, grade six students within an integrated co-teaching class debated the math statement, “In division, the quotient is smaller than the dividend,” with students articulating, justifying and proving whether the statement was always, never or sometimes true. The two teachers each worked with a range of learners including students with disabilities, conferencing with individual students and offering individualized scaffolds for either content, or discussion prompts for small group conversations. Extensions for students already at mastery included more advanced questions utilizing variables to push students in their thinking before student-led discussions.
- Grade six students in an ELA class analyzed the central idea of a Greek mythology text, to identify and make connections between what they gathered from informational text to the literary elements of Greek myths. The students were supported with multiple access points for this work, from a guided reading chart for informational text to graphic organizers, from central idea task cards to close reading bookmarks and focus guides. Groups of students at mastery or beyond discussed and debated their noticings of Greek myth themes on an additional story on Hephaestus, Aphrodite or Ares. Students were further supported with discussion prompts, sentence starters and text organizers to be able to provide justification of their noticings of the text in their peer-to-peer discussions.
- Grade eight students in a Living Environment science class conducted a flash debate, utilizing and referencing inquiry they had conducted on a specific ecological challenge such as clean water, plastic use or renewable energy sources. Student pairs debated with each other, working to persuade their peers that their topic of choice was the most meaningful, citing specific factoids, research, and expert opinions through rounds of presentation and rebuttal. Students with language disabilities participated in the flash debate through an online platform, where they typed their arguments, rebuttals and response to each other on a shared document. Such level of student ownership and student thinking was evident within the vast majority but not all of the classes visited during this review.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are strategically aligned to State standards, and emphasize rigorous habits through the use of Power Words and higher order skills through applications of discussion protocols.

### Impact

The school curricula across grades and content areas coherently promotes college and career readiness, and all students must demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- Unit and lesson plans show alignment to content-specific State standards, with teachers and school leaders making strategic adjustments based on student achievement data. ELA curriculum maps for all grades provide evidence for multiple units with a balance between literary and non-fiction texts, along with the consistent integration of the requirement for students to evaluate the quality of texts and use text-based evidence in support of their arguments. Across grade levels, unit plans in math ask students to reason abstractly and concretely as they show their thinking in multiple ways and apply their thinking in real-world situations. Across all content areas and grades, planned instructional tasks focus attention on students engaging in collaborative discussions in one-to-one, in small and whole group settings resulting in curricular coherence.
- Higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and are embedded schoolwide in a coherent fashion. Across all grades and content areas, lesson and unit plans reference, apply and embed Power Words, such as justify, infer, examine, analyze, explain, and verify, in student tasks, thus promoting college and career readiness skills for all students. For example, plans for a grade seven ELA lesson begin the student conversations with the guiding question, “Have you ever justified doing the wrong thing?” as a starting point for analysis on a Sudanese refugee’s oral history. In a grade eight US History unit plan on the Bill of Rights, the culminating task includes a student-lead Socratic seminar where students examine relevant Supreme Court cases, analyze texts and justify or argue against restrictions on free speech. Planned supports for a variety of learners, including MLLs and students with disabilities are evident in plans include vocabulary previews and translations, sentence stems for applying the Power Words, as well as the consistent schoolwide use of rubrics for utilizing Text Based Details, a school developed tool.
- Planned tasks within lesson plans and unit plans consistently emphasize rigorous habits through the use of discussion protocols to support student cognitive engagement, foster student ownership, and demonstrate thinking. Plans for a grade eight ELA lesson utilize the mock trial discussion protocol for students to debate the question, “If the United States is suffering economically, should they still offer political asylum to refugees?” Plans for a grade seven math lesson included the use of a four-corners discussion protocol for the students to articulate and justify an algebraic expression to accurately describe the mathematical problem. Such application of discussion protocols, along with planned scaffolds and discussion supports, were embedded in a coherent way across grades and content areas so that all learners must demonstrate their thinking.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The school uses common assessments such as the school-developed curriculum-based Instructional Focus Data Tracker benchmark assessments, specific ELA and math assessments, as well as the State exams to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas. Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self- and peer-assessment.

### Impact

Assessment results are used to provide meaningful feedback to students, and teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs through self- and peer-assessments, and purposeful technology use within instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and teachers use common assessments such as the NYS ELA and math tests, curricula-based assessments and the schoolwide Instructional Focus Data Tracker to create a clear portrait of student mastery, identify trends and patterns regarding student progress and provide meaningful feedback to teachers about student needs. For example, school leaders and teachers noted that the incoming students in grade six performed well on the State math exams, but struggled with higher order comprehension and constructed responses on the State ELA exam. This feedback from the common assessments lead school leaders and teachers to strategically embed discussion protocols such as flash debates and Socratic seminars to build student proficiency in higher order thinking skills towards writing performance. Students using such protocols for peer discussions were observed in every class visited during this Quality Review.
- Through school assessment practices, students across grades receive actionable and meaningful feedback that supports their growth across content areas. Interviewed students described utilizing their goals tracking sheet in each of their content areas, as well as a discussion tracker, to create and track their progress towards their own goals, which are then assessed and monitored by their peers. Students described receiving not only actionable feedback that would impact their future work in that class, but meaningful and specific feedback that is applicable across content areas. One student described receiving feedback in ELA class to deepen his interpretation of the text to push the connection that he was making. The student then articulated not only the feedback but the concrete resources that his teacher provided to be able to further his vocabulary use and analysis of the text, in which he was able to then apply in strengthening his arguments in his social studies class.
- Within a grade six mathematics lesson, students in small groups debated the statement, "the quotient is smaller than the dividend," determining whether or not the statement is always true, sometimes true or never true. Students then responded to an in-the-moment poll through their electronic tablets, and then provided justification of their thoughts either by mathematical statements, examples, or models. Teachers utilized the online platform to initially identify misconceptions, make changes to their conferencing schedule to support groups of students, provide individualized scaffolds on stickers for both content and discussion. Students were heard utilizing the scaffolds, modifying their work based on teacher feedback, and then articulating their revised justifications to peers. Teachers then posted a student example that was submitted as part of the poll, so that students can then analyze and give feedback on peer work based on a schoolwide criteria and rubric for making thinking visible. Such practices were evidenced across grades and content areas throughout the school.

## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and teachers consistently communicate instructional high expectations to the entire staff through individual, grade and department meetings. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students through the schoolwide grading policy, assessment practices and guidance for next steps.

### Impact

Teachers share a culture of mutual accountability for instructional expectations, and students own their educational experience in preparation for the next level through the use of individualized and focused feedback and guidance.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders articulate high expectations for all staff through discussions at schoolwide professional development (PD) days and faculty conferences, the teacher handbook, as well as individual, grade-specific inquiry and cross-grade department teacher team meetings. Through these individual and group meetings, school leaders detail expectations related to instruction, planning and professional collaborations. School leaders meet regularly with teachers individually to engage in reviews of professional growth, expectations for high quality teaching and learning and follow-up based on attended PD. To expand capacity in delivering effective instruction, all teachers receive feedback on their performance in relation to best practices highlighted by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.
- Through individual and team discussions at grade and common planning meetings, staff members receive PD support aligned to their needs and interests. Teacher teams consistently collaborate through a school-wide online platform which is used to develop curriculum maps, content units, and assessments. In addition, this platform is used to share student performance data for each benchmark assessments, create corresponding action plans for small group instruction and scaffolds to support access to content material for groups of students. Following each teacher team inquiry meeting, teachers set collective plans for instruction and student performance to be met by subsequent meetings. Such collaboration, interviewed teachers stated, results in a sense of shared trust, collaboration and accountability where teachers openly share their instructional struggles and successes, as well as student concerns and concrete steps for individualized support.
- Staff members communicate expectations and feedback that prepare students for the next level through a variety of means, including the schoolwide grading policy and consistent use of content-specific rubrics that are aligned by department across grades. All students, including high-need subgroups are given advisement and guidance for their next steps such as high school information sessions, school selection assistance meetings and advisory, where students themselves are tasked in outlining interests, identifying schools of interest and mapping the steps necessary to be successful candidates for those schools, thus promoting ownership of their educational experience. Interviewed students described how they receive feedback from peers and teachers such as becoming less repetitive with arguments and deepening their analysis in writing and discussions by a greater use of text-based details. Students also shared how such feedback improves their work and has helped them to obtain a better grade, and articulated personal steps that they need to take so that they can be successful in transitioning to the high school of their choice.



## Additional Finding

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and teacher peers through grade-inquiry and department teacher teams, support development for all teachers through strategic cycles of observations, peer-led classroom intervisitations and analysis of student work. Teachers receive feedback that accurately captures their strengths, challenges and outlines their next steps using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

### Impact

Teachers receive feedback from peers and school leaders that articulates clear expectations for their practice that both support teacher development and aligns with individual teacher, department, and schoolwide goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct strategic informal walkthroughs at the start of the school year and observations for all teachers to identify patterns and trends around the schoolwide instructional focus to support student cognitive engagement, foster student ownership, and the demonstration of thinking. Utilizing specific literacy components, school leaders identified strengths of practice, as well as areas for improvement, which then were addressed with individual teachers, grade and department teams and in staff conferences for PD planning. Formal observation reports specifically articulate student work products through direct student quotes and actions as part of feedback to teachers on classroom practice. Further analysis of student achievement and work products are deepened through discussions at team and individual levels about student performance on common assessments and evident in the school-developed Instructional Focus Data Tracker, that identify patterns and trends at every benchmark assessment for individual and groups of students including MLLs and students with disabilities.
- Teacher peers further support their colleagues through discussions at grade-specific team meetings. Applying inquiry protocols such as the tuning protocol to examine student performances, they set instructional expectations for the team to meet which are assessed and re-evaluated at subsequent meetings. Intervisitations occur and teacher team members follow-up on these expectations and provide feedback on planning and instruction. These conversations serve as the basis for colleagues to support each other through peer-facilitated PD that builds instructional practices.
- Teacher feedback, which accurately capture strengths and challenges as identified within each of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* components, alignment with the schoolwide instructional focus of using discussion techniques to support, and deepening student thinking, as well as teacher professional goals. School leaders utilize individual conferences with teachers to create professional goals and support plans. Interviewed teachers unanimously stated that their observation feedback is concrete and actionable, supports their professional goals and improves their practice, which was evident by the review of artifacts. For example, a teacher observation report from the previous year that articulated a specific goal to utilize discussion protocols to build upon higher-order thinking of peers. Professional goal setting for this same teacher included honing student discussions and higher level thinking through appropriately tiered questions for groups of students. Within this Quality Review, this particular teacher was observed utilizing peer-to-peer discussion protocols, using tiered questions, as well as discussion and extension supports for grade seven students as they analyzed, discussed and debated a Sudanese refugee's oral history.