

Quality Review Report

2016-2017

**M.S. 129 Academy for Independent Learning and
Leadership**

Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 12X129

**2055 Mapes Ave.
Bronx
NY 10460**

Principal: Raymond Granda

**Dates of Review:
January 18, 2017 - January 19, 2017**

Lead Reviewer: Buffie Simmons

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. 129 Academy for Independent Learning and Leadership 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 Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Finding	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	Area of Celebration	Well Developed

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	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		
<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	Well Developed
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:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across most classrooms, teachers create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned to the Common Core and the curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

The school provides actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and adjusts curricular and instructional decisions so that all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a range of common assessments that include Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions and on-demand writing assessments. Teachers administer running records to assess student fluency and comprehension of fiction. This data is used to determine strategic groups, refine whole class instruction and determine student need for additional instructional support. The analysis of assessment results has led to the development of instructional goals for teaching and reinforcement of skills across all subject areas. Teachers gather data that include formative assessments and student work to ascertain levels of student learning. The use of data to inform and adjust instruction in all content areas is consistent across classrooms, and classroom checks for understanding lead to instructional adjustments that support all learners. As such, based on the 2015-2016 New York State assessments, student proficiency has increased by twenty percent in grade eight English Language Arts (ELA) and ten percent in eighth grade math.
- Classroom visits and meetings with teachers and students revealed that feedback on student work includes next steps. Teachers were observed conferring with students and providing them with strategies for improvement. During these meetings, students shared work products that included rubrics, conferencing and checklists, and teacher feedback. Comments about an ELA task provided students with positive feedback and next steps. One teacher noted, "I like how you stated your claim/position in your introduction. That made it easy for me to follow your claim throughout your essay" and "Next steps: don't be afraid to include a hook. This will help engage the reader to continue reading!" Across subjects, feedback is detailed and provides students with clear next steps. On a grade seven argumentative writing activity, a child received 2.5 points out of 4 on the rubric. The teacher offered the following feedback: "I like how you stated your claim/position in your introduction. Your thesis statement was very clear. Next steps: try to mention another position, a counterclaim, and explain why the evidence for your claim outweighed the counterclaim. Try to prove the other side wrong."
- All teachers utilize item analysis and disaggregated data to identify learning gaps, trends and patterns. Analyzed test scores of specific subgroups of students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have enabled teachers to pinpoint which standards has been mastered and which group of students requires re-teaching, remediation, or enrichment. Based on the school's snapshot, student performance exceeds district averages in ELA and math.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders ensure that the school's curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate rigorous tasks and instructional shifts across grades and subjects.

Impact

The faculty promotes college and career readiness for students, ensuring that a variety of learners have access to high level curricula and rigorous tasks are practiced.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses *Scholastic*, *National Geographic*, *NEWSELA*, *Rally*, *COACH*, and *Achieve 3000* as well as teacher-created units. In math, *Go Math!* and *Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3)* are used as the base of curriculum overview. Using data from teacher-created ELA pre-assessments, teachers determine the priority standards for the units and use various resources such as *EngageNY* to construct meaningful learning experiences for students. Modifications and accommodations are a component of the school curriculum maps and lesson plans. However, not all documents include specific modifications and/or accommodations for students, especially those identified as high achieving.
- The school is focusing on creating a unified science curriculum. Science and social studies non-fiction content has been incorporated in English Language Arts (ELA) units. Performance tasks and project based learning are being integrated in the science curriculum. In the interdisciplinary unit plan for grade seven ELA, students are tasked with experiencing different historical figures' journeys during the years of exploration. Blending ELA and social studies, students are tasked to make connections and formulate analytical responses through the examination of various narrative and expository texts and historical documents. For example, in an ELA unit on *Lord of the Flies*, students are introduced to how the author uses symbolism to represent humanity, and students analyze the text to determine how society should be governed.
- Lesson plans across subjects cite essential questions aligned to Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* and include domain specific vocabulary. Learning objectives are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, some lessons include the use of multiple representations and strategies to model teachers' thinking, guided practice, and independent practice. For example, a writing lesson plan includes tasks to support diverse learners. Supports include modeling, small group instruction, visuals, rubrics, word walls, and checklists indicating the expectations of the task.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school's belief system of aligning curriculum and challenging all learners is the foundation for instructional practices across classrooms that foster multiple entry points, engaging tasks, and high quality student work products.

Impact

The delivery of instruction consistently employs scaffolds and differentiated reading materials outlined in the curriculum to provide entry points that are appropriately challenging for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal explained that teachers are expected to create multiple entry points to support student engagement and provide students with an opportunity to actively participate in the lesson, regardless of performance abilities. Across classrooms, students worked in differentiated groups based on their needs as indicated in the most recent assessment data. Teachers frequently modeled activities for students.
- Across the classrooms, teachers use the Smartboard to display visuals, review the lesson objectives, and discuss the content and skills being taught throughout the lesson. Currently, there is an emphasis on providing multiple entry points for all students. As a result of this, teachers scaffold their resources. For example, in the ELA classes students used reading activities based on their Lexile level. There is also a focus on providing challenging tasks to promote critical thinking. In one ELA class, students viewed images of forms of protest: Martin Luther King Jr. on the Mall in Washington D.C., demonstrators protesting segregation in front of Woolworth's department store, workers on strike and boycotting California grapes. Students discussed these types of protests and the implications of these actions, which prompted higher-order thinking as demonstrated by students' oral responses and written work.
- Teachers also focus on infusing literacy across the content areas. In a grade seven math class, students focused on academic vocabulary, such as proportion, percent, rate, ratio, unit rate, percent decrease and increase, principal, simple interest, mark-up and mark-down, tax, discount, and sale. During class visits, students were observed annotating text. Teachers closed their lessons by asking students to summarize their learning or to share possible misconceptions. Through these instructional practices, students receive academic support to accelerate their learning and improve the quality of their work products. During all classroom visits, teachers had an agenda describing the procedures for the lesson, as well as the essential questions. One of the English teachers explained that she uses similar essential questions in the department to develop curricular connections across grades.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training tied to these expectations. The school's culture for learning ensures that all students are prepared for the next level.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations exists at this school for both leaders and staff, and students are supported in reaching goals through feedback.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders have created high levels of expectations that is communicated to staff via workshops, a handbook and the website. In addition, systems of peer-visitations and observations with feedback, including next steps and suggested workshops, emulate a culture where accountability is reciprocal between all stakeholders. Frequent cycles of observations hold staff accountable for meeting expectations for pedagogical practice.
- Teachers and other staff have articulated high expectations and shared information with students, leading to student progress towards mastery of Common Core Learning Standards. All students participate in research for the college fair. Students are provided with information about college choices, different courses of study, and why college is important. In the grade eight ELA curriculum, students analyze and respond to quotes and excerpts from the texts. On a performance task, students imagined they were college admissions counselors, analyzing three essays and selecting which applicant would be the best fit for their respective college. Additionally, students evaluate each writer's effectiveness in addressing the target audience, presenting a claim, and using comparison and contrast in the essay. Students participate in college tours and student-led conferences with teachers and parents to present goals, expectations and next steps. In addition, students are aware of the skills needed to advance to the next level and can set goals and record their progress accordingly.
- School leaders indicated that community expectations for students' academic and personal behavior are aligned to the current school goals. For instance, the school has initiated an "All in Campaign" to help students keep track of their grades, exam scores, and attendance. Each of these students is supported by a volunteer staff member who helps the student stay on track and get closer to his or her goals. The school utilizes an online grading platform so that students and families can have easy access to data on current student performance and are able to monitor their progress. In addition, all staff members including the principal and assistant principals collectively discuss students' current performance and come up with plans to promote improved achievement, as needed for each student. Individually, the staff supports students and provides feedback to ensure positive student outcomes. Students who were interviewed stated that this campaign helps them to stay on track. One student stated, "If you are struggling with a class you can always go to your teachers, but you also get support after school." Students explained that staff members seek them out to provide help, and the online grading system helps teachers monitor their class's progress. Parents also expressed that the school is supporting their children to meet college and career readiness expectations. As a result of these high expectations, there is a current shift in terms of the culture and student achievement, as evidenced by a ninety-five percent course passing rate.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders, supported by teacher peers, engage in feedback loops that encompass classroom observation data and analysis of learning outcomes and student work. Targeted feedback to teachers strategically promotes professional growth and reflection by all teachers.

Impact

All teachers are well supported with feedback that strengthens their practice and is focused on the clear expectations set by school leaders.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders believe that teachers, especially new teachers, are best supported through multiple opportunities to practice new pedagogical skills in an environment where they receive consistent and effective feedback. Through frequent formal and informal observations, the administrative cabinet uses low inference notes to provide teachers with concrete examples of strengths and next steps to support their growth. The cabinet also consistently engages all teachers in conversations that analyze classroom data and student work samples in order to align instructional practices to student outcomes. Observation reports contain feedback that includes next steps, suggesting teachers engage in professional development opportunities such as intervisitation or peer coaching.
- An analysis of trends in teacher performance ratings identified two areas where improvement was needed. This strategic plan resulted in providing teachers strong professional development aligned to goals. For example, peer intervisitation to observe effective collaborative team-teaching strategies was implemented with strategic next steps for the improvement of a specific teacher's growth. This was part of an exploration of strategies to assure school-wide improved teacher practice focused on the collaborative classroom. In addition, the analysis of the second and third rounds of teacher observations indicated improved assessment practices for most teachers.
- Through the thoughtful analysis of teacher practices, the teachers' professional development plans are modified to include identified trends to address all teachers' needs. Currently, veteran staff members are strategically placed to provide opportunities to support their colleagues. During observation conferences administrators also refer to student work and previous evaluator notes to ensure clarity of expectations for teacher's growth. For instance, one teacher was reminded to provide students with opportunities to make thinking visible and allow students to explain their thinking by providing the necessary gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student. During feedback sessions, teachers are also encouraged to seek support from lead teachers, assistant principals and mentors who are an integral part of the feedback loop. These collaborative endeavors allow administrators and selected teacher peers to provide meaningful feedback to all teachers, in alignment with their goals, resulting in their improved levels of effectiveness across domains evaluated by observations to date, as evidenced by Advance data.

Additional Finding

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations in teams that analyze assessment data and student work. Teams also work together to build instructional capacity, progress towards school goals, and promote the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS).

Impact

A focus on assessment analysis has built capacity and has resulted in sustained reflection and improvement of instructional practices school-wide to advance student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Regularly scheduled meetings enable teacher teams to discuss student data, patterns, and trends, relative to analysis of student work across content areas. As a result, teachers adjust instructional tasks and revise the curriculum units to meet the needs of their students. Teachers developed argumentative writing units across content areas in support of the CCLS and incorporate strategies to develop academic vocabulary within these units. Additionally, they also share best practices for struggling students during small group instruction. During the formal meeting, they use inquiry protocols for looking at student work. The protocol has them determine what students do successfully, what students still need to learn, misconceptions and then determine implications for teacher planning and preparation. Colleagues initiate dialogues during team meetings and modify plans after receiving feedback from the team. Teacher team meetings are facilitated by a lead teacher who sets the agenda and organizes group tasks on a weekly basis.
- Teachers collaborate regularly, formally and informally, make key decisions about curriculum choices, topics of interest, and selection of resources, along with administrative guidance and support. The use of a rubric for teacher team meetings informs the needs and relevance of professional development and teacher support. For example, based on feedback from teacher teams, assessment techniques have become a schoolwide focus. Teachers are provided with an opportunity to attend professional development outside of the school and are expected to share and turnkey their learning with their colleagues during team meetings. Teachers stated that they appreciated this extended time to work together with colleagues. Grade-level leaders and content area teachers use team meetings to make decisions that are then proposed to the principal for school wide initiatives. For example, teachers schedule visits to one another's classrooms, share instructional materials and documents with one another, and give each other feedback on strategies used in their classrooms. Thus, teacher leadership is being strengthened school wide, as teachers collaborate on a regular basis and contribute to key decisions that affect student learning.
- Teachers meet to present a case conference on a group of at-risk students to improve their academic performance. Teachers have developed methods for tracking the growth of these students by examining class data and student work and, using this information, have determined implications for planning and preparation. Additionally, these students are monitored for attendance and behavior. In some cases, students' classes were changed informally with increased check-ins for targeted groups of students. The team examines data and discusses theories of action. Teachers shared that they are now more aware of struggling students and of how to strengthen their instructional repertoire to meet the needs of these students.