



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Walter Francis White School

Public/Intermediate School 41

**411 Thatford Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11212**

Principal: Theresa Siegel

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Reviewer: Nick Butt

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Walter Francis White School has an enrollment of 824 students, covering grades K through 8. The population comprises 78% Black students, 21% Hispanic students and 1% from other ethnic backgrounds. There are 6% special education students. Three percent of students are English language learners, a lower proportion than is typically found in similar and City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 88% of its students. Student attendance, at 90%, is below the average for similar and City schools.

The school has a distinctive arts program funded through a 21st Century grant, which centers on the predominant African, Caribbean and Hispanic cultures represented among students. It has won national awards for its Kid Witness News Team. There have been important changes in the administration in the past year, and two new coaches have been appointed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a highly effective instructional leader who has a very clear vision for the school that is supported by the entire school community.
- The school has made good gains in its performance this year as a result of changes effected by the principal.
- There is a very committed staff, who work collegially to serve the needs of all the students.
- Teachers know their students well and use data effectively to monitor the progress of individuals and arrange support programs as necessary.
- The comprehensive arts program engages students very well and gives them an enthusiasm for learning.
- The school has very good systems in place to meet the needs of its most vulnerable students.
- Budgeting decisions ensure staffing and resources are targeted very well to where student need is greatest.
- Students appreciate all the school does for them and value the progress they are making in their studies.
- High quality professional development from the administration and coaches is having a beneficial impact on instruction.
- All members of staff contribute in positive ways to the smooth-running of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Use data to monitor more closely the progress of high-achieving students and the differences between the performance of boys and girls.
- Make consistent use of day-to-day assessment to differentiate work in lessons.
- Modify the Comprehensive Education Plan to enable staff to monitor and evaluate the impact of their goal-setting at more regular intervals.
- Identify more frequent opportunities for teachers to analyze data and plan together during the school day.
- Further develop measures to improve attendance, particularly through raising its profile among students and their parents.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal has brought a sharper instructional focus to the school, which has led to rapid improvements in outcomes for students. The administration works well together in an open and dynamic way and has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Teachers are enthusiastic and greatly committed to their students. Several grew up locally and talk about "giving something back to my neighborhood." The school is effective at tracking the performance of individual students and setting goals for their development, particularly those most in need. There are informal plans for wider development agreed by teachers at their regular meetings, but the impact of these is not easily evaluated. The school makes very good use of its limited budget to secure value for money.

The arts program involves students in drama, dance, drumming and story-telling. There is a major production each year, which involves many students. The school is renowned nationwide for its excellence in video journalism. Students enjoy coming to school and welcome the variety of activities that are available. However, attendance is still low and the school is eager to make more of rewarding those students who do attend well.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers gather data from State and City tests to gain a clear understanding of the performance of individual students, and areas where improvement is required. They use the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System in the kindergarten through grade 3 to measure progress in language. In grades 3 through 8 the Princeton Review is used effectively to supplement their assessments. The principal has also introduced Teachers' College Reviews, which give a wide range of information about the progress of students in the higher grades. Teachers devise their own assessments for particular units of study and have a thorough knowledge of each child in their class. They keep portfolios of significant work that build up to show the gains the students have made over time.

The principal and assistant principals examine data routinely to look for trends at class and grade level and to put in place programs of support where required. This year the focus has been on grade 5 because of an unexpected dip in students' performance in State tests. They also make comparisons with similar schools and City-wide schools. Recent data shows that while the school has been keeping pace with similar schools in its results, its students have made greater gains. This is because teachers have a better understanding of their students and intervention is more sharply focused.

The school uses data to monitor the progress of special education students and the small number of English language learners, but does not focus on how students perform by

ethnicity or gender. There is insufficient emphasis on higher-achieving students who may be exceeding grade level, but may not be doing as well as they could.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Regular meetings are held to review data and to set goals and targets for students. Teachers look at the performance of classes, subjects and grades as well as at individuals and take remedial action where necessary to ensure groups do not fall behind. This process has become more rigorous with the new administration and the appointment of new coaches, and is proving successful in accelerating students’ progress. The school was among the top schools for the gains its students made last year City-wide.

Particular attention is paid to those students with additional learning needs, and those who are vulnerable. The level of support is geared carefully to individual requirements as set out in students’ individual education plans. The school has developed expertise in working with students with behavioral difficulties and integrating them successfully into classrooms so that they make good progress.

The school has high expectations of students, and has a code of conduct that is shared by all. Teachers hold conferences with students to gather their views and to set targets for improvement with them. Students are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do next to succeed. Parents are kept well informed about their children’s progress, and encouraged to help them at home. In grades 4 and 8 this is done partly through on-line tutoring, which teachers set up and can access, forming a productive dialogue with parents.

The Comprehensive Education Plan sets challenging school-wide targets, but contains too much detail to be an effective working tool. Consequently, much of the school’s planning is done informally by groups of colleagues working together. It is difficult for them to evaluate the impact of progress on their goals, because they do not have formal interim reviews of development.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The curriculum focuses appropriately on developing students’ basic literacy and numeracy skills, and is enriched by a wide range of scientific and arts-based experiences. The coaches have been instrumental in modifying the mandated curriculum to make it more relevant for students, and in supporting teachers in providing the resources they need to deliver it effectively. The school is rightly proud of its involvement in a series of performing arts projects, and these build students’ confidence and their social skills as they collaborate together.

Teachers are held accountable for the progress of their students. The principal has moved teachers towards a model of differentiating instruction for identified groups of students within their classes based on their analysis of data. While there are very good examples of this practice, especially in the lower grades, it is not yet consistent across the whole school. In some classrooms not enough attention is paid to day-to-day assessment so that opportunities are missed to set targeted work for students. Most students enjoy their lessons, and relationships with teachers are good. They behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. One student commented, "Teachers go out of their way to make this a positive learning environment."

Teachers are very dedicated in their work, and give up their free time to support students and to attend planning and professional development meetings. Some very effective budgeting decisions have contributed to students' rapid gains in performance this year, including investment in leveled libraries of reading materials that are of interest to students. Scheduling and staffing decisions are focused on optimizing student outcomes, with resources and time aligned where they can be most effective.

Despite its best efforts, the school has been unable to raise attendance. The figures are distorted by a few long-term absences. Rewards are given for good attendance, but the principal believes that more could be made of this to bring home to students and their families how important it is that they are at school.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has made some key appointments in the past year. She looks for teachers for whom working in the school is a vocation rather than a job. As she put it, "You can teach them how to teach, but you can't teach them how to care." The principal is respected for her instructional expertise and her availability to parents and students. Professional development has been at the centre of the school's work this year, with the new coaches quickly identifying areas for focus and implementing programs to assist staff. Topics have included behavior management, teaching math more effectively and differentiating work according to student need. The coaches' enthusiasm and expertise has had a real impact on the quality of instruction, and teachers have welcomed their input.

The principal and other leaders monitor instruction closely, visiting classrooms and undertaking formal observations. Detailed programs are put in place where improvement is required, with targets and realistic timeframes for follow-up. Teachers are encouraged to observe one another's lessons and to visit other schools to see good practice. The quality of instruction has improved as a result of this work, with better student outcomes and more rapid gains in their learning.

It has been difficult this year to schedule meetings during the school day, and there has been too much reliance on teachers giving up their free time. It is a mark of their commitment to the school that so many willingly do so. Much is covered in these meetings, with assistant principals, grade leaders and coaches driving forward improvement through open and honest discussion. Brief notes are kept, but there is no formal method of recording plans or measuring the impact of actions in achieving them.

The school has strong links with a range of outside bodies, which support the academic curriculum and students' pastoral needs effectively. These include the Center for Arts Education, the Leadership Program, Panasonic and the Office for Youth Development. All adults operate together as a cohesive team to ensure the school's smooth running.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school undertakes frequent interim assessments of students' progress, and analyzes the results in depth at individual, class and grade level. School leaders make comparisons across classrooms and schools so that they know exactly how their students are performing. Modifications are made to programs of instruction in consultation with the coaches, and a wide range of interventions put in place immediately to support students whose progress is a concern. These include morning tutorials, lunch and learn, an after school program and Saturday academy. For example, some grade 4 students were found not to have mastered inference skills when reading, so a special group was set up to assist them.

Plans are developed in study groups, but because much of the work is done through discussion with notes kept of the meetings, evaluation of progress towards achieving the goals lacks rigor. The Comprehensive Education Plan contains clear whole school plans, but has too much detail to make it a practical working document. In this respect it is too formal. Leaders are eager to adapt their planning so that it enables staff to keep track of progress in an efficient way at regular intervals, and tells them how they will know when they have achieved their goals. Despite some shortcomings the impact of these procedures has been good, and students have made impressive gains in their learning in all areas this year.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Walter Francis White School (PS/IS 041)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	