



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Walt Whitman Middle School

Intermediate School 246

**72 Veronica Place
Brooklyn
NY 11226**

Principal: Bentley Warrington

Dates of review: September 26 - 28, 2006

Reviewer: Renee Middleton

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Walt Whitman Middle School serves students from grades 6 through 8. There are 1000 students on roll, with 90% stability, which is lower than similar schools. There are 227 special education students and 147 English language learners. The ethnic make-up of the students is 87.5% Black, 11.5% Hispanic and 1% White. Around three quarters of students are Title 1 eligible. Attendance is 75%, much lower than similar and schools across the City.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal effectively leads the school and meets challenges through clear vision and actions to improve students' achievement.
- School leaders contribute significantly to the strategic development and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning across the school.
- The school is a safe environment for teachers to teach and students to learn.
- The school has responsive and caring systems that effectively serve students in their times of social and emotional need.
- Special education students and English language learners make good progress.
- Teachers work collaboratively to advance their teaching skills, to deepen their knowledge of students, and improve strategies to enhance instruction.
- The school's focus on team planning significantly contributes to the development of instruction and builds teachers' capacity to accelerate the learning of their students.
- The effective use of instructional programs promotes good teaching strategies in English language arts and mathematics.
- The focus on teachers' continuing professional development through coaching and disseminating 'turnkey' processes promotes good teaching strategies that improve students' learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the achievement of students across the school through the continued development of strategies and systems to assess and analyze data.
- Monitor students' achievement consistently in relation to cohort, gender, ethnicity grade level and subject in order to identify underachievement.
- Improve teachers' use of day-to-day assessment to inform planning more effectively for the next steps in students' learning.
- Ensure greater consistency in planning to meet the needs of students of different abilities in the same class.
- Identify continued professional development in the use of assessment clearly in the Comprehensive Education Plan and the school's 2006 Action Plan.
- Develop rigorous systems to improve communication with parents in order to raise their expectations and the rate of students' attendance across the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school overall.

Since 2005, the school has been under the current leadership, which is making a positive impact on teaching and learning. The school has met demanding goals of building the confidence of its staff, students and parents, focusing on purposeful teaching and ensuring a safe environment for students to learn. There is a shared vision for the future of the school with diligent efforts to improve students' academic achievement. Students say that they feel safe and secure within the school boundaries. The school's image is positive and there is willingness in the whole school community to embrace change.

The school works earnestly to create educational opportunities for its diverse group of students. The introduction of effective instructional programs, especially in English language arts and mathematics are making a positive impact on learning across the school. The Comprehensive Education Plan guides school activities and focuses on priorities to raise student achievement in all subjects. Emphasis is on eradicating inconsistencies in the quality of instructional practice and on bringing the performance of students on a par with similar schools, particularly in social studies and science.

The school has clearly identified that staff professional development is a key to improving teaching and learning. This is a strong element in the school's practice. Instructional strategies are developing to ensure that all students' learning is satisfactory and their rate of progress improves over time. With an emphasis on instruction that is technology-based and grounded in performance standards, the school has begun to equip staff and students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

The school has clearly identified where improvements are needed and has the means to achieve its goals through the growing expertise of teachers, supported by a wide range and high number of services to enhance students' learning.

There is an established network of local businesses and community leaders to help the principal keep abreast of potential issues in the locality adjacent to the school.

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.

With effective procedures for collecting data in place, the school consistently undertakes whole school data analysis of students' performance at each grade level. The school leaders take an active role in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and ensuring that most teachers are aware of the data available. Priorities have been set in the Comprehensive Education Plan to ensure that teachers use the information to improve their practice. In response to information from lesson observations, team discussions and data analysis, most teachers follow recommendations to refine instructional practice and

the curriculum. However, this is an area identified for development because most teachers need support in interpreting the data relating to their subject. Not all teachers are using their own day-to-day assessments to fully determine what each student knows and to plan next steps in learning.

Most teachers use disaggregated results well to assess the performance of special education students and English language learners and to track their progress. The provision for special education students and English language learners is effective in meeting their learning needs and enabling them to make good progress. Needs are swiftly identified and a range of appropriate interventions deployed and reviewed on a regular basis.

No comparisons are made at present of the performance of boys compared to that of girls, nor in relation to ethnicity, but the school has begun closer scrutiny of data relating to grade cohorts. The school has also identified that it makes insufficient use of data to compare itself with schools across the City, or with similar schools. It does not consistently disaggregate data relating to differences in gender, although the school responded to the need to vary reading strategies and resources to engage boys in reading for enjoyment.

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 undeveloped with some areas of proficiency.

Although some teachers have begun to take account of the different needs and abilities within their class when planning tasks, differentiation is not included in all lesson planning. Teachers vary in the modifications they make to lesson plans and strategies to address students’ academic needs. The school recognizes the need to increase teachers’ use of day-to-day assessment, to improve planning, and to set goals in all subject areas to address the range of abilities across all grade levels. There are growing numbers of teachers using data from ‘Grow Reports’ and local assessments such as the Diagnostic Reading Assessment and the school’s own mathematics tests. When practice is effective, teachers use rubrics and students’ test results to inform instructional planning that take account students’ strengths and weaknesses. This further assists in the grouping of students by ability as exemplified in English language arts and mathematics classes.

Communication with parents is a high priority for the school. Most parents have not gained the confidence to be involved in the school. A newsletter containing school information, a principal’s message, general information, and a calendar of events is sent home periodically. Students and their parents have responded positively to improving communication, support and advice offered by the school. There is slow, but growing involvement of parents in the life of the school.

The school has set priorities to increase parents’ understanding of the curriculum, standards, and assessments. Strategies are planned to engage parents more directly in their children’s learning. The school is yet to determine how teachers can increase understanding between the home and school to raise expectations, and to support parents who do not have high levels of literacy become more involved in their children’s academic progress.

Where expectations are high, teachers convey to students and parents realistic academic improvement goals and subject targets. Students and their parents/caregivers are invited to conferences about their child's performance when concerns arise and quarterly report reviews relay overall progress and achievement. However, not all teachers involve parents as well as they could in their child's education through the setting and sharing of individual goals.

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 with some undeveloped areas.

Instructional programs, such as America's Choice, focus teaching strategies and help students become competent and self-motivated learners. Within this program, students make good progress in English language arts and mathematics. Lessons are well structured, effectively paced, and learning objectives are rigorously aligned to the curriculum. English language arts results indicate that grade 6 and 7 students master the curriculum and become effective learners. The impact of this program lies in the effective promotion of teachers' use of strategies for addressing students' understanding of each lesson's learning objectives. The rubrics help teachers to plan effectively and teachers are beginning to use child-friendly rubrics to help students understand and identify the next steps in their learning and to know what is needed to improve their performance. The setting of students' personal goals based on rubrics and teachers' assessment is not yet consistently implemented.

The school offers a supplementary instructional program to the English language learners. Emphasis is given to instructing the first level of English language acquisition alongside students' native language to consolidate the mastery of common language conventions. Intermediate English learners benefit from supported lessons in English. The outcome of tests shows that the program is effective in raising students' achievement.

The school has made significant advances in collaboration between special education, English language learning, and general education teachers to mainstream students and to offer aligned curriculum and educational experiences. This is exemplified by students' visits to local museums, exploratory science, and extended activities linked to the core subjects and literacy.

The rate of attendance in the school is significantly lower than similar schools. There are strategies in place to address absence and tardiness of students. A review of procedures for contacting parents at the beginning of an absence is underway as current practice has been identified as ineffective in alerting parents to the school's concerns.

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 school has rightly focused on the professional development of staff to raise standards and has developed as a professional learning community. The academy leaders contribute significantly to the strategic development and improvements in the quality of

teaching and learning across the school. Teachers seek advice and share good practice. They make good use of team meetings to review individual student's progress, to undertake curriculum planning, and to develop instructional strategies.

Effective decisions are made relating to goal setting, which focus strongly on raising students' achievement. All professional development is focused on accelerating learning. This is exemplified by workshops and courses in technology, literacy and development of the workshop model of the America's Choice program in mathematics. Teachers have been keen to take advantage of training to develop their computer skills and to enhance their teaching by using resources such as Intelliboards. This demonstrates a determined effort to widen their range of learning styles so that all students have the opportunity to achieve.

The school has acquired a wealth of curriculum and human resources to support students in their learning. It is developing a positive "family" climate in the school in which there is the potential for students to thrive with the help of classroom assistants, collaborative teaching and administrative staff. The very wide range of support professionals working in the school is providing a complementary and integrated service. This is having a positive impact on students' well-being and progress.

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 undeveloped.

The principal effectively leads the school and meets challenges through clear vision and actions to improve students' achievement. Classrooms are visited regularly by the principal and assistant principals for formal lesson observations. Analysis of the quality of teaching and learning observed informs professional development. As a result, the school leadership has effectively built capacity among teachers, enabling them to be accountable and more effective in their planning and curriculum alignment.

The school uses the outcome of lesson observations to find the best practices for improving and implementing its instructional programs and services for students. There is exemplary practice in the development of English language arts and mathematics rubrics to assess students' performance in a range of assignments.

To facilitate assessment and feedback on students' performance, the school has formed a testing team that provides teachers with professional development workshops on testing procedures and the use of data to inform instruction. The school leaders and most teachers effectively review student data collected from the results of State and other tests. Teachers, across content areas, collaborate effectively in teams. They are led by the assistant principals in developing interdisciplinary instruction. Data is beginning to be used across the school to align curriculum planning. Disaggregated data provides teachers with an appropriate starting point for integrating subject goals for students.

There is limited sampling and comparison of students' work to ensure that teachers' judgment and expectations of what students achieve is realistically high. Continued

professional development in the use of assessment is not identified clearly enough in the Comprehensive Education Plan or the school's 2006 Action Plan.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Walt Whitman Middle School (MS 246)	∅	✓	+
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		