



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Robert A Van Wyck School

Junior High School 217

**85 - 05 144th Street
Queens
NY 11435**

Principal: Jeannette Reed

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Reviewer: Frank Jones

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert A Van Wyck School has 1280 students from grade 6 through 8. Forty-two percent of the students are from Hispanic backgrounds, alongside 37% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 16% Black and the remaining 5% White and other ethnic groups. The school is a Turning Points School and is currently operating at near 100% capacity. Approximately a fifth of the students are English language learners and 12% are special education students. The school receives Title 1 funding with 79% student eligibility. Attendance figures are presently 92%, which is above the average of other City schools.

The majority of students enter the school at grade 6 with a smaller number following at the start of grade 7. The school is organized into three units. Sixth graders are taught in a self-contained section of the school and the remaining students are housed in the main building that is divided into three academies on separate floors. This organizational structure enhances academic and personal development for the students.

Robert A Van Wyck Middle School is committed to the philosophy that all students should be in a learning environment that enables them to be taught to be creative problem solvers who are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides outstanding leadership that is acknowledged by those she leads and the wider community.
- The assistant principals provide strong, thoughtful and intelligent leadership and are prime movers in the development of the school and its drive to raise student achievement.
- The staff is highly motivated and committed to providing for the social, emotional and academic needs of all students, in partnership with parents.
- Senior staff make good use of a wide range of data to promote the progress and achievement of students.
- Staff support for each other is outstanding and is central to the predominantly good and improving teaching throughout the school.
- The school is committed to being a learning organization where all have something to offer and there is an acknowledgement that all have much to learn.
- The organization of the school enhances the quality of learning and teaching, induction into the school and the monitoring of student progress and achievement.
- The administration and teachers regularly monitor the school's performance and the impact of teaching styles on learning.
- Targeted professional development is a strong feature of the school and serves to increase the quality of teaching, the understanding of learning and the resultant impact on student achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Identify more clearly the individual needs of students to enable specific learning goals to be established that more accurately reflect those needs.
- Further develop class-based assessment so that teachers use this information to introduce differentiation as a teaching strategy to meet the needs of students of different performance levels in the same class.
- Extend the use of data across grades to enable a more coherent and fluent educational journey for the students.
- Revisit the organization of teaching for English language learners to examine ways to increase the speed of access to and command of language.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school with some proficient areas.

The principal was appointed six years ago and during that time she has transformed the school. Staff, parents, students and the wider community evidence this view. Staff enjoy and are committed to their work, students are engaged in and are excited by their learning and there is a unified and purposeful direction. The principal provides strong leadership tempered with compassion and concern for all those she leads but is uncompromising in her quest for excellence for all students. She knows her fellow administrators well and through delegation has empowered them. The resultant effect is a highly efficient and effective team unified by a single purpose.

School leaders constantly examine the difference the school is making to cohorts and individual students using the comprehensive data it collects and analyzes. The school sets high expectations for achievement for all students and is able to draw on a range of support and enrichment programs to meet identified need. The care for students is also a strength of the school.

The areas for improvement identified in this report are predominantly those already identified for further work but where specific strategies have not been implemented to move the school forward. However the principal, supported by her cabinet, is already in the process of devising appropriate plans to remedy this situation. The school has a strong capacity for further improvement.

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 well developed.

The school uses a wide range of assessments and tests, some of which are generated internally. These are analyzed by the cabinet and provide useful information on student achievement for staff. Progress of individual students is measured and monitored four times a year from marking of work and on an annual basis. This information is used to identify the need for additional intervention strategies or enrichment activities. A moderation of marking is done at the first marking period for students who have recently entered the school, to establish a baseline from which progress can be measured.

The principal uses data to track trends over time and against similar schools. The analysis for 2006 shows favorable comparisons with such schools and a trend of improvement in English language arts. The school has recognized the need to address the progress and achievement of its English language learners, who comprise a significant part of the population, to ensure that overall performance in English language arts shows improvement.

The school interprets interim assessment data well for purposes that include a class-by-class analysis of concepts taught to ascertain where they have been successful and those areas that need additional work. Progress for individual students is also monitored in this way. This data is also used to compare instruction within and across grades and provide professional development opportunities for individual staff as appropriate. Tracking of students' progress as they move from grade to grade is less systematic, so that there is not always continuity of expectation and instruction.

Teachers have access to a wide range of data and are generally confident in its use. They use all this information to provide individual teaching programs or additional help in a specific aspect of the curriculum as appropriate and refocus their teaching to meet identified shortcomings in areas of achievement. Progress against individualized education plans special education students is carefully monitored and modifications to interventions made if necessary.

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 well developed.

There is a clear desire among the staff to do the very best for their students and this is reflected in their commitment to supporting all students both within the lesson and in their own time. This is a view held by students who consider that teachers have high expectations of them and will continue to help them until they understand. The inability to understand is seen as a trigger for action and support rather than failure on the part of the student. The strong team culture within each academy and faculty ensures that the needs of individual students are shared and understood, and also means that planning is very much a collaborative exercise.

The setting of short-term goals for students is less well developed in the context of challenge. Teachers are aware of the performance of the students they teach but targets are limited to increasing performance by a level per grade rather than identifying individual learning steps. There is a greater reliance on delivering the curriculum rather than focusing on individual need. That having been said, assessment is good and teachers use this information to challenge students' learning. Those students identified as needing an increased challenge have access to an enriched and more demanding curriculum. Support for special education students is effective, but the school is presently less successful in addressing the needs of English language learners.

Parents are regularly informed about the curriculum being offered and the progress that their children are making. They appreciate the high aspirations that the school has for their children and fully support them. The students themselves are well aware of what is expected of them and show a real determination to succeed. This view appears to be held by the wider community who now select Robert A Van Wyck in preference to other neighborhood schools.

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 well developed.

The school is careful to ensure it matches the curriculum to meet the needs of the students. Analysis identifies gaps and planning reflects this. There is consistency across academies with regard to the basic subjects but their individual identities are denoted by variations in emphasis and theme. A program of support is in place to help special education students and English language learners, including small group instruction.

The school is a Turning Points school and as such it focuses heavily on students’ learning styles and implements teaching strategies to enable these to be met. The school adopts a practical, problem-solving approach to mathematics and school results suggest that this is successful strategy. The students talk very positively about the range of experiences available through the school.

The teachers are fully aware of their accountability to maximize student outcomes and they use performance information to refine their instructional programs. The assistant principals closely monitor the performance of students by engaging in lesson observations that focus on learning, progress and book scrutiny. Such observations are followed by discussion with the relevant member of staff and this is a process that teachers welcome. The high expectations of most teachers are evident when they regularly ask students to give their opinions about issues or to articulate how they have tackled a mathematical problem. The students respond positively to these challenges, presenting their ideas or research with pride and confidence. Students’ high level of interest in their work is clearly evident.

Where instruction is particularly good, teachers use regular formal assessments to measure progress and understanding, they then use this information to differentiate activities to meet assessed need. The school recognizes that this feature of their work is less well developed and is taking steps to improve by providing professional development for teachers.

The principal uses data to inform staffing and resource requirements. These have included the purchase of white boards and laptops for all sixth grade students and will eventually extend to all grades. As a result, there is a good match of both personnel and resources to meet the curriculum. The positive attitude and obvious enjoyment of students in coming to school is reflected in a higher than average attendance rate. They respect and trust their teachers, and are confident of help when they need it.

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 well developed with several significant strengths.

The principal provides outstanding leadership. She has appointed all her assistant principals, trained and empowered them so that, as a team, they lead the school with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The staff fully support the administration in their pursuit of excellence and understand exactly what they want to achieve. The students and their achievement are at the heart of all the school does and administrators and teachers

are actively encouraged to think critically, take risks and to encourage their students to pose questions.

Teachers are selected to meet the needs of the school. Professional development is valued by the teachers and underpins the rising achievement within the school. Training supports new initiatives. Opportunities are created for teachers to work collaboratively across and within academies. Professional development is closely aligned to the needs of the school and students. Teachers welcome professional development as it supports a common desire to improve.

As a result of regular classroom observation, the cabinet members know the capabilities of every staff member. All concerned view the process as developmental and observations are followed by professional dialogues and appropriate training to enhance development. The school recognizes that the frequency of visits sometimes leaves little time for improvement to be made. Teachers see it as their right to be observed as they feel it will lead to improvement. Teachers also welcome the opportunity to watch colleagues teach.

The principal has transformed the school and all staff support her unequivocally and recognize her achievements. Staff are involved in decision-making and are confident in voicing their opinions. The school runs smoothly because all involved know their role and have confidence in others to fulfill theirs. Productive partnerships with community-based organizations enhance student achievement and personal development.

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 well developed.

The school is good at reflection, reviewing the success of plans they have put in place to achieve their goals and, importantly, acting on their findings. This is true of both students' achievement and teachers' practice. Academies use the available data on a regular basis to ascertain what they have to do to further develop students' achievement. The Comprehensive Education Plan clearly identifies where gains have been made and which students need additional programs to increase progress. The identification of underdeveloped curriculum areas enables the school to refocus their teaching to remedy this. This realignment of the curriculum is a strong feature of the school and reflects the school's view that the needs of students are at the center of all they do.

The use of data informs decision-making at all levels and school leaders are good at analyzing and acting upon the results. Staff understand the need for this and welcome the information and support it offers to shape their teaching. The school is most effective when focusing on moving students from level 3 to grade 4 and providing for those who are gifted and talented. Programs, including additional focused teaching time, are available for those students who experience difficulties and the involvement of parents and other support groups is a good feature. The school recognizes the need to improve the progress of the English language learners and has met with some success, but there is room for improvement in this area.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Robert A Van Wyck School [JHS 217]	∅	✓	+
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