

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Robert Vernam School

Elementary - Middle School 042

**488 Beach 66 Street
Queens
NY 11692**

Principal: Riva Madden

Dates of review: November 12 - 13, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Christina Lewis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Robert Vernam is an elementary - middle school with 754 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 76% Black, 17% Hispanic, 3% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 88.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Robert Vernam is a positive learning environment with high expectations for students' personal and academic success. As a result, students are interested in their learning and want to succeed. Older students are very articulate about their aims to go to college. The principal, through her strong and effective leadership, ensures that the school community shares the clear vision for the school. This provides a common understanding of the long-term school goals that need to be achieved to improve students' outcomes. However, the school has yet to consistently share interim goals and the small steps needed to achieve them with students and their families in all subjects and grades. Consequently, parents are not always sure how best to support their children and students are unable to evaluate their progress towards achieving long-term goals.

The school offers a strong curriculum with cross-curricular links in many subjects, for example, in social studies, English and art. School leaders use a wide range of data successfully in all subjects to understand the needs of each student and to track student progress through the school. The work of the Inquiry Team has been instrumental in raising teachers understanding and use of data, particularly with low-achieving students. However, not all lessons are sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of learners and result in some students making little progress in their learning and some lessons lacking pace and rigor.

Teachers are encouraged to be reflective about their teaching and have many opportunities to work collaboratively including being part of mini Inquiry Teams. However, they do not have individual professional development plans with clear goals to improve the quality of instruction and rate of change. School leaders are currently developing rigorous systems to evaluate the impact of all school initiatives and teachers' professional development plans.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school regularly collects and analyzes a wide range of data to provide a clear picture of individual student need.
- The school has developed a strong curriculum including the arts that emphasizes State standards.
- Staff are encouraged to be reflective and have many opportunities to work collaboratively to discuss and improve their practice.
- The school's high expectations, positive learning environment, and supportive relationships, mean that students are interested in their learning and want to succeed.
- The very effective work of the Inquiry Team has had a positive impact on teacher's use and understanding of data.
- The principal has a clear, motivational vision for the future development of the school that is understood and shared by the school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that students and their families have a clear understanding of interim and short-term goals in all subjects, and the steps needed to achieve these.
- Further develop teachers' expertise throughout the school in planning differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners.
- Improve the quality of monitoring instruction by providing individual professional development plans for teachers that are regularly used in providing feedback to improve teaching.
- Accurately and rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of all school initiatives including teachers' professional development plans.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects and analyzes a wide range of data, including formative and summative assessments, that provide a clear picture of students' learning needs and tracks progress as they move through the school. At the beginning of the year, all students undertake baseline assessments in core subjects. Leaders and faculty complete this consistently in English language arts and math where there is a richness of data. The school uses this information very effectively to inform instructional and organizational decisions, such as providing extra support to students through support services or placing high achieving students in enrichment classes. Data is used less rigorously in other subjects. Although, some teacher-generated assessments are beginning to give the school a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses of individual students in other areas.

The school has identified all sub groups and through the work of the Inquiry Team, boys in the lowest third improved significantly in English language arts last year. The school is developing strategies for engaging boys in writing, for example by using technology. This is having a positive impact on their development. The small group of English language learners is also well supported by an experienced language teacher. As a result, these students make good progress. The school's provision for students with special educational needs is also very effective due to intensive programs of support. Consequently, where possible these students are mainstreamed before they reach grade 8.

The school provides students and their families with feedback about students' progress regularly throughout the year. However, these progress reports do not identify short-term goals or next steps across all core subjects. Consequently, parents are unsure of how they can support their children to achieve their long term goals. Effective tools and assessment rubrics have been developed that allow students and families to track the progress over time but this is not done on a regular basis for all core subjects.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school leaders have effectively involved the school community in each stage of the school improvement cycles. The leadership team has evaluated the work of the school accurately and identified and shared new goals. As a result, the school community knows and understands the over-arching goals for school improvement, through the newly published Comprehensive Educational Plan. This document has clear time

frames and action plans to achieve these goals. Teachers have goals for grade levels and subjects. In addition, teachers have planned short-term goals for individual and groups of students in many classes and subjects. However, the school has yet to consistently share interim goals and ways to achieve them with students and their families in all subjects and grades. As a result, although students know their long-term goals, they are not always able to articulate the next steps necessary to achieve them. Where teachers do demonstrate this good practice, such as in grade 5 social studies and the collaborative team teaching classes, students know exactly what they have to do to improve and because of this are able to assess their own progress. Regular common prep times and scheduled meetings with the administration allow teachers to discuss students' progress towards achieving school or grade goals.

There are several very positive incentive schemes in place that communicates high expectations very effectively to students and parents in behavior, attendance and academic success. Attendance has been an issue in the school but newly introduced strategies to combat this have already proved successful. Such as awarding attendance certificates to students and parents who have high attendance rates. After school programs for older students are also an added incentive to promote good behavior along with the opportunity to earn "B" bucks to spend in the school store.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school delivers a varied and stimulating curriculum in all core subjects that is aligned to State standards. A particular strength of the school is the cross curricular links that the curriculum leaders have developed in reading, writing, social studies and some aspects of visual arts. For example, students study early Americans in social studies and teachers effectively link this with the artwork of the period and to fictional stories covering the same events. As a result, the students have a deeper understanding of what they are studying in addition to developing independent learning and study skills. This year the school has enrichment classes on the upper grades that effectively accelerate the progress of higher-achieving pupils. For example a group of grade 8 students are being fast tracked in math to take a Regents exam in preparation for gaining High School credits.

Many teachers use a range of assessment to inform planning and differentiate instruction, particularly in English language arts, social studies and math. However, this is not always used consistently across the school. In some lessons the learning outcomes are unclear and are not paced. In addition, students spend unnecessary time copying instructions. As a result, the opportunity is lost to maximize their learning. Not all teachers sufficiently challenge students. Consequently, some students make little progress in their work or struggle with content that is not matched to their need or based on prior knowledge.

Students respond well to the high levels of trust and respect they receive from adults in the school, as well as the high expectations for their academic success. As a result, they show interest and engagement in their learning and want to do well. Led by the principal, students are very well supported by a group of caring professionals who have successfully created a positive leaning environment where it is "Cool to learn".

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school leaders regularly monitor the effectiveness of instruction by walkthroughs, formal and informal observations. Teachers are given feedback but leaders do not provide teachers with individual professional development plans highlighting goals for improving their work. This sometimes leads to a lack of urgency in what needs to change to improve outcomes for students. Administration plan and provide a range of professional development to support teachers in improving their instruction. These include modeling and visiting other schools to observe best practice. As a result teachers say it has improved their practice and made them more reflective.

The work of the Inquiry Team has had a very positive impact on teachers' confidence in using and understanding data by encouraging staff to focus on why some students are struggling. This has resulted in the team developing a deeper understanding of how social and emotional needs can negatively influence learning and what strategies are needed to overcome this. Mini Inquiry Teams have been developed in each class to focus on lowest achieving students. In early years' classes this has highlighted the need for more focused phonics teaching. In other grades, the focus has been on identifying learning styles and adapting lessons to provide a more varied menu of activities, such as technology and drama. It is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives fully but the principal feels that these initiatives have the potential to accelerate students' progress.

The school has a strong guidance and academic support program that effectively helps students identified in need of extra help to develop social, emotional and academic skills. Parents value this service as a strength of the school and say it helps them to understand the emotional needs of their children as well as enhancing the home-school partnership. Before-school programs also provide good catch up opportunities for students falling behind. Most programs are flexible and run in ten-week cycles enabling students to move out once they have made the required progress.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

There are sound systems in place to review and monitor a range of data regularly. Assessment is effective in English language arts math and social studies. Teachers are developing rubrics and assessment materials for all subjects in addition to using available tests or alternative assessment tools. There is an assessment timetable for all grades in most subjects with suitable timeframes and benchmarks. This information enables leaders to evaluate progress systematically towards achieving grade and school goals. In addition, they monitor the progress of individual students at regular meetings with teachers who highlight any concerns. This leads to flexible programs of support for groups or individual students using a range of suitable intervention services. The school leaders modify plans as necessary to improve student outcomes, for example, the introduction of a new reading comprehension program in the higher grades.

The principal and assistant principal evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work from the progress report, Quality Review and other available data. Areas identified for improvement become priorities in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. However, they have yet to implement systems to evaluate accurately the effectiveness of the many new initiatives and the professional development plans of staff. Because of these deficiencies the pace of change to improve the quality of instruction does not always happen with enough urgency to immediately improve student outcomes.

The principal is an inspirational leader with a highly focused vision for the future development of the school and improved performance of students. She has created and shared this vision very effectively with the whole school community. The motto is displayed throughout the school and students of all ages are able to quote it. More importantly, it inspires the whole school community to work together in ensuring that the vision becomes reality. "We can. We will. We must achieve. We will go to College."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

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|--|---|----------|----------|----------|
| School name: Robert Vernam School | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students? | | | | X |
| 1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students? | | | X | |
| 1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data? | | X | | |
| 1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | | | X | |
| Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals? | | | X | |
| 2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)? | | | X | |
| 2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families? | | X | | |
| 2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 2 | | | X | |

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

| Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals. | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|--|---|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <i>To what extent do ...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals? | | X | | | | | |
| 3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals? | | | X | | | | |
| 3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 3 | | | | | | | |
| | | | X | | | | |
| Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers? | | X | | | | | |
| 4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning? | | | X | | | | |
| 4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes? | | | X | | | | |
| 4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 4 | | | | | | | |
| | | | X | | | | |
| Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do...</i> | △ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year? | | | X | | | | |
| 5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year? | | | X | | | | |
| 5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies? | | X | | | | | |
| 5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 5 | | | | | | | |
| | | | X | | | | |
| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
| △ | Underdeveloped | ➤ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features | ✓ | Proficient | + | Well Developed |