

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

Walt Whitman

Middle School 246

**72 Veronica Place
Brooklyn
NY 11226**

Principal: Bentley Warrington

**Dates of review: March 28 - 29, 2011
Lead Reviewer: Rhonda Hurdle-Taylor**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Walt Whitman is a middle school with 594 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 86% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 23% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 91.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Professional development is a high priority and the administrative cabinet uses proactive observation tools and databased systems efficiently to support teacher practice leading to improved academic results.
 - Deep inspection of instruction strengthens administrator's knowledge of teachers' abilities and needs. Formal and informal observations, focused walk-through checklists, student portfolios, teacher data initiative results, and student assessment data, serve as the foundation for teacher evaluations and tenure decisions. Teachers receive prompt and meaningful feedback on their performance, which includes specific strategies that help to strengthen their pedagogy. As a result, instructional practices are improving school-wide.
 - The school's professional development plan includes tiered opportunities based on information gleaned from teacher surveys, professional goal setting sheets, formal observations, teacher mid-year and end-of-year reviews, weekly focused walks, and student portfolios. Coaches and lead teachers provide mentoring and modeling for new teachers that guide them in setting individual professional goals and support their instructional needs. Consequently, teacher professional growth is evident.
- Highly effective student services and collaborative partnerships provide students with opportunities to grow academically and socially.
 - The school assessment team meets bi-monthly with leaders and staff addressing students' social needs and sharing strategies that reduce student emotional outbursts. The guidance team and dean resolve conflicts through mediation, and individual and group counseling. In addition, the school's restructuring into academies allows students during their three-year tenure to be known by a consistent group of adults. Thus, students exhibit few behavior issues and are attentive to their academics.
 - To accomplish their goal of providing students with unparalleled project-based learning experiences while promoting meaningful real world opportunities, school leaders employ the services of Brooklyn College, a key organization in enhancing the school's arts theme. As a result, the school's theme is fully realized as evidenced by student work products.
- Students benefit from a project-based learning curriculum that incorporates high school and college readiness skill development, including art and technology strands that support learning.
 - The school's standards-based curriculum includes accelerated courses in integrated algebra and living environment that allow students to accrue high school credit. Accelerated students are immersed in instruction that pique their interest, supports their learning, and provides real world experiences. Results from these high-stakes examinations show that

over 98% of the students passed the integrated algebra Regent exam and 100% passed the living environment Regent.

- The school's curriculum has been re-designed to include project-based learning experiences that are intricately woven among the major content areas and into the art curriculum. Engineers who visit math classrooms guide students in applying the necessary math concepts for building an apartment. Written assignments, designing, and research, allow students to extend their learning. As a result, there is a seamless connection across content areas helping students to improve their learning.
- Leaders in collaboration with key stakeholders make informed organizational decisions across all aspects of the school that support learning outcomes.
 - Teachers are scheduled for weekly congruency grade meetings to analyze student data and engage in professional discourse. An influx of English language learners provides the impetus for coaches to customize the English language arts curriculum to include components and challenging tasks that closely match these students' needs. Preliminary interim assessment results show improved performance for this sub-group of students.
 - A rich analysis of student data has led to strategic programming changes allowing struggling students to actively participate in a newly purchased technology program. Students, working in small groups, are benefitting from focused instruction in English language arts that is helping to improve their comprehension skills.
- School leaders and teacher teams work collaboratively to examine school-based data and develop tools to strengthen curriculum and instruction.
 - Teacher leaders work with teams of teachers utilizing online programs to collect and carefully organize student assessment data from periodic and supplemental exams. This is used effectively to make appropriate classroom level instructional decisions. Consequently, results from formative and summative assessments demonstrate improvements.
 - During weekly meetings, teacher teams collaboratively analyze student projects and portfolios, and identify students' areas of needs. As a result differentiated academic tasks, conferencing, and problem solving activities are used as a classroom strategy to improve student outcomes.
- The school environment supports high expectations for learning, behavior, and attendance that are effectively shared with families.
 - The principal conveys his expectations for academic excellence through regular correspondences that include letters to parents, the Walt Whitman parent handbook, phone messenger, parent orientation, and progress reports over six-week intervals, thus enriching and creating open communication with families. In an effort to improve their attendance rate, the school put systems in place to immediately contact families when students are absent, resulting in clear expectations regarding student performance.

- Parent workshops facilitated by the parent coordinator and parent teacher association executives, focusing on the Learning Environment Survey, college readiness, building test sophistication skills, and ARIS, strengthen the home-school connection. These sessions allow parents to stay abreast of their children's academic progress and enable them to actively plan strategies that assist in their education.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop teacher use of a wider variety of differentiated instructional practices to ensure that all students are challenged and learning is maximized.
 - Teachers discuss students' learning styles and instructional needs during congruent meetings and place students in tiers based on needs. Lessons and strategies targeted to address students' deficiencies are aimed at increasing academic rigor but are not always designed to engage students in all sub-groups. A focus on differentiated instruction is not yet embedded across classrooms and teaching strategies lead to uneven levels of student engagement. Thus, not all teachers' instruction address a range of students' ability levels.
- Build on the school's goal setting to extend the analysis of assessment data to inform and set differentiated learning goals for struggling students.
 - While the majority of teachers use easily accessible student data to set individual student goals, this practice has not yet taken root throughout the school and there is no evidence that all teachers use data to set goals for targeted students. Therefore, it is difficult to assess whether some students are making adequate progress.
- Create more opportunities for teacher teams to engage in collaborative work that encourage leadership and influence school decision making.
 - Teacher leaders facilitate team-meeting discussions and work collaboratively with colleagues to help them plan lessons and improve classroom instruction. However, as distributed leadership structures are still expanding to include more opportunities for teachers to take on additional responsibility in the decision-making process, there is limited teacher empowerment.
- Establish clear systems for evaluating the effectiveness of professional development supports and capacity building that affect teaching and learning.
 - The administrative team review feedback from teacher leaders and minutes from teacher team meetings during cabinet in order to ensure effective collaboration. However, the school is still developing a system for measuring the impact of mentoring supports for new teachers, thus, delaying adjustments to the professional development plan.
 - The school's programming allows teachers to engage in common planning via teacher teams using an inquiry approach. However, there is no structured method of assessing teachers' capacity to make school-wide changes and decisions that impact improved student learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Walt Whitman	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X	
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X		
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X	
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X

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

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X	
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X	
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X	
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X		

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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