

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Peter G. Van Alst**

**Elementary School**

**14-14 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Long Island City, NY 11102  
Queens  
NY 11102**

**Principal: Anne Bussel**

**Dates of review: March 27-28, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip A. Composto**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Peter Van Alst is an elementary school with 625 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 16% Black, 50% Hispanic, 11% White, and 23% Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 92.5%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school cultivates a safe and respectful school environment that supports learning, encourages attendance and enhances personal growth of students and adults. (1.4)
  - The School Survey indicates that 96% of parents, students and teachers feel the school maintains a safe and orderly environment for learning. Students state that they feel comfortable talking to their principal, assistant principals, teachers, counselor and other adults, addressing problems. The guidance counselor works closely with classroom teachers to coordinate attendance as well as students' academic and social emotional needs. In addition to their classroom teachers, students indicate that school leaders and the guidance counselor know them very well and are always available to resolve their academic and personal issues. One student said, "I always talk to the principal." The school maintains over a 91% rate of attendance and has very few suspensions. Visits to each classroom show students eager to improve their efforts and work habits. As a result, the school maintains a sharp focus on the academic and personal development of students and adults.
- The school's guidance services, internal capacity and strong partnerships with various organizations support families and students' personal as well as academic development resulting in accelerated learning. (4.4)
  - The school works with The Elmezzi Foundation on a collaborative project called the Zone126 Promise Neighborhood. Zone126 offers assessments and planning to ensure all children and families living in Astoria Houses can access a complete continuum of solutions from cradle to career choice. To encourage parents to attend the monthly Community Outreach Dinners, Zone126 provides students with a letter of invite for parents accompanied by nutritional snacks for children. Consequently, students and families feel supported, students enjoy coming to school, engage in real life learning experiences and feel as an integral part of the learning community.
  - The school incorporates character development themes into reading and writing assignments. Teachers utilize a guidance/advisement resource binder to support students on the path toward post secondary readiness. The resource binder contains materials that are used to explore positive character traits of successful people. A new trait such as responsibility, respect, honesty and perseverance is introduced each month through read-aloud, shared reading, songs, art activities and quotes. To enhance parental involvement, the trait of the month is listed on the school calendar. This has led to a decline in occurrences from 11 in 2010 to 1 in 2011 and an improvement on student achievement as noted on periodic assessment data.
- Teachers effectively use a wide range of assessments that are aligned to the curriculum to guide instructional decisions and inform planning, resulting in a clear understanding of the performance of students. (2.2)

- Individual teachers and teacher teams effectively use baseline data, interim assessments, running records, ECLAS, conference notes, rubrics, math unit assessments and social studies and science performance tasks that are aligned with the school's key standards and curricula. All subjects include a comprehensive assessment component which guides teachers' instructional and curricular decisions. Teachers use this assessment data to group students for instruction and to modify lessons based on students' academic needs. For example, the grade 3 teacher team analyzed student work using CCLS aligned writing rubrics and grouped students for instruction based on appropriate entry levels into writing lessons. As a result, student groupings are flexible so that tasks are matched to meet their learning needs and academic deficits are met by grade, subject and student subgroup as evidenced by increased volume and improved levels of performance noted in student work folders and writing rubrics.
- School leaders make purposeful organizational decisions that are well aligned with the school's instructional goals so that all students' needs are met, resulting in improved learning outcomes. (1.3)
  - The school uses its resources successfully to improve learning outcomes of all students. For example, English language learners and high needs students are instructed by a push in English as a second language teacher and an academic intervention teacher while the classroom teacher works with a small group. A literacy coach is paid per diem three days a week to support teachers in planning and implementing curriculum. The school has a magnet grant which offers high quality, comprehensive instruction in art, music, movement and dance, which includes trips to museums, theaters and galleries as well as an arts-in-residence program for all grades. These organizational structures and appropriate use of resources are well aligned to the school's goals and lead to improved learning outcomes evidenced in a 24% increase in the number of students meeting proficiency as noted on instructionally targeted assessments.
  - The school schedule enables teams of teachers to meet regularly to share best practices and improve instruction for identified student subgroups. For example, teacher teams meet with the Magnet resource specialist to create rigorous, concept-based units that incorporate the arts and align lessons to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Each team discusses literacy tasks adapted from the CCLS bundle and design specific units of study and rubrics on each grade level. As a result, the school reports an increase in student achievement as measured by unit tests designed by teacher teams.
- School leaders and teachers effectively align curricula to key standards and offer a range of positive learning experiences including the arts that support student learning. (1.1)
  - The school strategically uses scope and sequence guides, units of study, curriculum maps and rubrics in all subjects and exposes the staff to the Common Core State Standards. For example, in preparation for implementing the CCLS aligned tasks, grade level team meetings were

conducted to align Everyday Math (EM) lessons with the new standards. Findings showed that EM did not fully support the CCLS aligned unit development. Therefore, the math coach worked with each grade team to revamp lessons and identify additional resources. This has increased the quality of the curriculum through the improved alignment of lessons to CCLS in order to close the achievement gap and prepare students for middle school as evidenced by the mastery of math concepts on unit tests.

- Teachers regularly analyze student work and unit requirements to assure that the needs of all students, especially students with special needs and English language learners are met. For example, the fifth grade teachers worked on further scaffolding compare and contrast tasks. They revised their units to include technology, graphic organizers, art activities and informative checklists to cognitively engage all students. This has led to an increase in students' understanding of compare and contrast as evidenced by student work products such as creating pottery from different ancient civilization.
- The school conveys high expectations that promote parent involvement and support learning so that students and families work toward meeting the school's goals. (3.4)
  - Teacher teams and staff communicate high expectations through parent workshops on community resources, child safety and promotional criteria. Students meet with the counselors in small groups and one on one to improve their self-esteem and enhance their social skills so that they achieve their goals. Parents were very clear that they value the school's efforts in communicating high expectations for students' academic, attendance and personal success. Parents and students participate in meetings that provide important information regarding articulation to middle school. For example, the school counselor collaborates with the counselor from the zoned middle school. The students visit the middle school. Parents meetings are held on completing the middle school application and individual questions are addressed. As a result, students are eager and ready to attend middle school and are well prepared for success in their next level of learning.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Fully connect feedback from teacher observation cycles to the school's chosen research-based framework in order to make informed staff development and personnel decisions. (4.1)
  - The school has adopted Danielson's research-based rubric to articulate clear expectations for teacher practices and use this framework during informal observations. Recommendations for improvements to instructional practices are based on the analysis of student work products. However, school leader's feedback to teachers does not fully capture the common instructional lens through the agreed upon use of the Danielson rubric. This inconsistency in the feedback process and language limits school leaders' ability to identify teachers' specific areas for improvement and strengthen their professional growth in order to positively impact student outcomes.

- Refine teaching practices to promote greater consistency in strategically differentiating instruction so that lessons challenge all students in their learning and result in meaningful work products. (1.2)
  - The school focuses on supporting high needs students such as English language learners and students with disabilities through lessons that include the use of various graphic organizers across grades. In one classroom ELL students were actively engaged in using their personal notebooks of challenging words to support vocabulary acquisition and strengthen academic vocabulary. However, high performing students are sometimes unchallenged and instructional strategies do not always offer meaningful extensions that further develop their thinking. For example, in another classroom, students who are above the grade band completed learning activities quickly and were not further challenged through appropriate extensions that extended their thinking. This limits additional opportunities for accelerated students to continually participate in critical thinking activities in order to further push cognitive growth.
- Enhance goal setting for greater consistency in identifying short term, differentiated student goals targeted to meet the needs of individual and groups of students for increase learning outcomes. (3.2)
  - Teacher teams use data to set long term goals for students, including English language learners and students with special needs, in greatest need of improvement, such as vocabulary development and problem-solving strategies. Most teams and classroom level goals have leveraged changes in some classrooms as evidenced by the use of intense phonics, strategies to improve students' decoding skills. However, the practice of setting interim goals and the use of specific academic interim benchmarks to meet granular learning targets of identified groups of students is not yet fully embedded across the school. In the absence of interim learning goals for students, opportunities to continually increase student progress are hindered.
- Expand systems to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams and teacher leadership development to support continuous student learning. (5.4)
  - School leaders are developing systems to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams and leadership opportunities. However, limited feedback to teams regarding the effectiveness of their work restricts the enhancement of the work of professional collaborations and structures. Consequently, the school's ability to provide feedback on target improvements in the work of teacher teams and capacity building is emerging.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: The Peter G. Van Alst School</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			<b>X</b>	

**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, guidance/advisement 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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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		

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>