

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Martin Van Buren High School
High School 435**

**230-17 HILLSIDE AVENUE
QUEENS
NY 11427**

Principal: MARILYN SHEVELL

Dates of review: April 23 - 25, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Martin Van Buren High School is a high school with 2,624 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 58% Black, 15% Hispanic, 2% White, 22% Asian students, and 2% other students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 84.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Thoughtful analysis and coordination by the assistant principal for security, and a school wide commitment to safety and discipline, have established a safe environment that supports positive adult-student interactions that promote learning. (1.4)
 - o The school purposefully deploys numerous floor teams throughout the building composed of deans and support staff, establishing a supportive adult presence. Thus, student movement is monitored well, and staff members are better acquainted with individual students. Students benefit from the orderly hall passings, regular reminders regarding school rules, and daily opportunities to interact positively with adults and peers, all of which have contributed to a reduction of infractions and suspensions and the establishment of a safe learning environment.
 - o Students are conscientious in class demonstrating attentiveness to instruction and responsiveness to teachers' directives and assignments. Classroom interactions are respectful and students are confident about expressing their thinking and asking questions. Students express appreciation for ways teachers help them learn by assigning them to groups enabling them to work together cooperatively. An academically advanced student indicated that she liked working with other students as it made her learning stronger, and other students who received help from peers indicated gratefulness for that support. In addition, students acknowledged a number of other ways that the school supported their learning. A special education student explained how her two teachers constantly monitor her work, another student spoke about the helpfulness of one-on-one conferences with teachers, one student described how a teacher used email to provide her with additional assignments, and others spoke about teachers who make themselves available to students during lunch periods.
- The school's well-coordinated efforts provide numerous programs that effectively support youth development and school goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students. (4.4)
 - o The implementation of a network supported revitalization plan has garnered the enthusiastic support of local politicians, universities, businesses, and parents to expand advanced course offerings. As a result, the school will offer a pre-med sequence for the next school year in addition to its many other specialized courses and student activities. Students who participate in the school's leaders program serve as interns at local community hospitals and nursing homes, and act as assistants in the school's physical education department. Staff, as a result of training they receive from an alliance with Adelphi University, teach a highly successful physics class to academically advanced freshman. Additionally, students earn college credits attending courses on Saturdays and evenings via the school's partnerships with Monroe College and Queensborough Community College. Robotics club members take a six-week technology course through a partnership with Polytechnic University, supporting students' understanding of robotics design, and earning them recognition in Citywide competitions. Incoming ninth graders participate in a class entitled "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens" designed to reinforce school and life skills. Teachers credit improvement in students' focus and writing stamina to skills learned in the course. In addition, an active student organization, a full arts programs, and numerous sports and clubs round-out a full complement of student real world learning that enrich students' lives both academically and emotionally.

- o The school, contracting with a community-based organization, provided all staff members with conflict resolution and behavior management training for boosting staff skills to strengthen a respectful school culture.
- The school analyzes a range of data to illuminate strengths and needs. (2.1)
 - o The school has carefully analyzed its Progress Report, Learning Environment Survey, State annual yearly progress targets, safety and scholarship data and its own environment survey and student assessments, to identify strengths and needs in terms of learning, support services, and environment. With network support, the school has used this overview effectively to create data driven goals and benchmarks as part of a targeted action plan for school improvement.
 - o The school reviewed grade reports, credit accumulation, and teacher observation data, and, in consultation with the union representative, reprogrammed mid-year so that failing students were assigned to teachers having success with at-risk students. Analysis of school-wide credit accumulation trends re-focused efforts on incoming ninth graders, prompting evaluation of current practices. This led to administrative adjustments in the type of student data shared with staff, the scheduling of teacher common planning times, and the scheduling of additional academic classes for students in the lowest third and for students with disabilities. In addition, the school developed a mandated life skills course for all ninth graders, and acquired new reading software, training teachers to use the software as part of academic intervention to support all students in meeting credit achievement benchmarks.
- Closely coordinated work with the Network, the school is producing action plans and strategic realignment of resources to support student-learning needs. (1.3)
 - o Successful collaboration between the school and its Network has influenced administrative use of data, student and teacher programming, and approaches to academic intervention. Based on the advice of the network, school administration is beginning to use a new online software program to identify data trends more efficiently, resulting in a strategic reprogramming leading to an additional teacher to assume data analysis responsibilities. As a result, teachers, teams, and departments have lists of identified students used to focus services, supporting the school's targeted action plan goals to improve performance for the lowest third of students. Programming to institute common planning periods this year and the implementation of inquiry work as a Circular-6 assignment enabled the development of department inquiry teams whose focus is on the school-wide emphasis on vocabulary development. Supervisors and teachers attribute current increases in credit accumulation and improvement in twelfth graders progress to these focal efforts. First term average credit accumulation for all grade 9 to grade 11 students, including special education, averaged at or above seven credits. For grade 12 students, first term results indicate that 70% of the cohort is considered on track or almost on track for graduation.
 - o The school's increased emphasis on data analysis is astutely illuminating specific needs and influencing decisions regarding teacher, student, and support personnel assignments. This is evident in this year's strategic mid-year programming adjustments. The school enrolled struggling ninth grade students in an extended school day program and an additional academic class, and matched them with stronger teachers to maximize academic and credit achievement. In addition, the creation of supervisory and support grade teams last year is intended to strengthen knowledge of each student cohort, support in hiring new staff, overall delivery of services, and mutual accountability for students' success.

- Inquiry work is increasing collaborative study of student learning and shared accountability for improved student outcomes. (4.2)
 - o Members of the school-wide inquiry team and newly created department teams speak in positive terms and with pride about their collaboration to improve outcomes for the school's lowest third performers. Members state that their inquiry work has cultivated increased outreach and communication between teachers and support personnel including guidance counselors. They attribute grouping and one-on-one student support as strategies that are benefitting students and are a direct result of their inquiry work.
 - o Teams are learning to evaluate student work and assessment results. Based on the school-wide team's analysis of students' vocabulary assessment results, the school shifted emphasis from content area vocabulary to focus solely on more abstract Tier II vocabulary for support of increased comprehension.

What the school needs to improve

- Evaluate units and tasks through the lens of Common Core Learning Standards to ensure that all students have challenging opportunities that promote academic success, closing of the achievement gap and post-secondary readiness. (1.1)
 - o Although the school has chosen writing and vocabulary as areas of emphasis across content areas and is well focused on using standards aligned curriculum, they have not yet begun the revision of curriculum maps to reflect expectations of the new Common Core instructional shifts. Learning about Common Core performance tasks is proceeding with network and outside consultant support but the link between this work and specific actions needed to close the achievement gap is not explicit.
 - o Inconsistencies in instructional tasks across the school preclude participation of all students in activities that promote high levels of cognitive engagement. Special education students were challenged in an English class to make inferences and use textual evidence to defend their reasoning, explain their thinking in an algebra class, and create detailed drawings in art class to demonstrate one point perspective. In other classes, however, English language learners looked up vocabulary words in a dictionary, twelfth graders solved routine geometry problems, and ninth graders made simple predictions and answered questions about title, author, and publisher. Thus, students miss opportunities to tackle challenging academic tasks and demonstrate thinking necessary to meet rigorous performance standards.
- Strengthen pedagogy to improve coherence of practices throughout the school so that all students have entry points into meaningful academic engagement. (1.2)
 - o While not always explicitly identified, common threads are evident school-wide in teachers embracing efforts to improve skills via data driven instruction using exit ticket quick assessments, use of portfolios as alternative assessment tools, introducing rubrics, and for purposes of differentiated class groupings. The lack of clearly articulated purpose and expectations for use of portfolios, however, contributes to variability in implementation.
 - o Teachers devise introductory questions to spur student thinking and making of personal connections, and have established routines, which include reading, writing and listening, use of technology, and student grouping. However, consistent strategic differentiation and use of higher order thinking questions is not an embedded practice and thus not all students have adequate entry or extensions into curriculum.

- Intensify use of assessments and monitoring of student learning so that key trends are more evident to inform timely adjustments to improve student academic outcomes. (2.2)
 - o Teachers and teacher teams analyze common department assessments and some classroom work at department meetings. However, they do not identify grade, subject, or subgroup trends. Rather, they focus on individual students, most of whom are within the bottom third of performance or within the 55-64 grade range. Thus, they miss opportunities to identify group strengths and needs that might inform on-going instructional adjustments to accelerate all students' learning. (b)
 - o While exit tickets are a common assessment practice, on-going monitoring during instruction varies. Opportunities for students to engage in substantive discussion are limited and thus both teachers and students miss on-the-spot assessment reflection afforded by such interactions. Students report that rubrics, when employed, are used mainly by teachers to grade their work. In most cases, specific feedback does not accompany rubric scores. Consequently, students do not benefit from the explicit feedback needed to understand their present level of performance and to generate next learning steps.
- Make explicit expectations for teacher evaluation and standardize observation practices to elevate teacher pedagogy and professional growth. (4.1)
 - o Although the school is part of the teacher effectiveness pilot, and has adopted the Danielson Framework for Teaching, that rubric is not in use school-wide. Thus, all teachers do not benefit from on-going feedback based on a common lens articulating clear expectations for performance. As a result, there is variability in expectations across departments, reducing cohesive purpose and effort school-wide to elevate instructional practices.
 - o While recent data and assessment initiatives are providing supervisors with useful information for evaluating progress and determining instructional and professional needs and have resulted in programming adjustments, systems remain primarily department driven rather than school-wide structures. For example, while the English department monitors teachers' progress toward established professional goals, the math department does not. While supervisors state that they use cabinet meetings to monitor progress and inform decisions, agendas indicate a limited joint sustained focus on student and teacher data analysis and evaluation of pedagogy. Thus, as systems develop there is variation in the ability to gauge progress to make informed school-wide decisions in assignments, retention, and professional development.
- Evaluate efficacy of current tracking systems to ensure timely school-wide adjustments for improved student learning outcomes. (5.3)
 - o The school relies on mid-year assessments to track progress but does not sufficiently analyze other periodic assessments. Thus, timely information is not available to ensure curriculum adjustments so that students achieve first term success. While increased focus on the school's lowest third, helped to contribute to a higher first term passage rate this year, significant numbers of students, overall, still did not meet first-term benchmarks.
 - o Tools such as rubrics and portfolios are growing practices to monitor student progress. The lack of clarity regarding expectations for their content and use, however, hinders consistency of evaluation and accurate monitoring of progress toward instructional goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Martin Van Buren High School	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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
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?		X		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?		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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		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, 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		

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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