

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

P.S./M.S 042 R. Vernam

K - 8 Q042

**488 Beach 66 Street
Queens
NY 11692**

Principal: Patricia Finn

**Dates of review: February 26 - 27, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

P.S./M.S. 042 R. Vernam is a K-8 school with 552 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 75 % Black, 19% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 89.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Strategic administrative decisions support development of teaching and learning to raise student achievement. (1.3)
 - The current principal, commencing service in September 2011, entered as the third principal within three years. Recognizing that “order proceeds learning,” she assessed a myriad of urgent concerns, using resources to tactically focus on systems and culture. This kindled confidence and investment, which began to redefine school culture and, in turn, enable the community to embrace and support needed reforms to boost student learning. The principal was able to garner support for new initiatives, including requiring that all eighth graders take high school integrated algebra. As a result, within one year the school moved from no 8th grade students achieving high school credit to 25% achieving credit, placing the school in 100% of its peer range and 62.6% of city range for that metric. The principal created mandated promotion-in-doubt (PID) action plans, which resulted in teachers completing a comprehensive data analysis of individual students and development of specific action steps to promote student success; established a school-wide behavior platform that has significantly reduced incidents and assured a safe learning environment; revised curriculum to better reflect Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and created grade level inquiry teams to promote collaborative focus on pedagogy, raising rigor of instructional tasks to reflect new instructional shifts. Faced with a shrinking budget and competing needs for teacher coaching, additional time-on-task student learning opportunities and the need to implement a structured writing curriculum, the administration initiated lead teachers and expanded the role of literary coach to support math instruction. These actions harnessed staff expertise in supporting school-wide professional development and made possible the establishment of after school and Saturday student programs and a contract with Teaching Matters to provide professional development around writing. Furthermore, the school secured funds for computer purchases through a City Council Resolution “A” project and maximized resources through laptop acquisitions to proactively prepare students for future online assessments and facilitate differentiated instructional support through online applications. Suffering the ravages of Hurricane Sandy, which closed the school and redeployed its students to an alternate site, the principal connected the school with several agencies and organizations to address the community’s great need for basic living supplies, and opened the school facility as a neighborhood resource center. In addition to meeting critical needs for its students and families, as a result of these partnerships the school received over \$32,000 of supplies, funds for uniform purchases and grant monies resulting in a \$10,000 award to invest in much needed books for classrooms. The staff recognizes these many strategic decisions as improving the school. The school’s union leader describes the changes as a “quantum leap,” noting that the school moved from the 13th to 26th percentile in its overall Progress Report percentile ranking last year. Additionally, it is notable that the school achieved a 93rd and 94th percentile rank in peer and citywide ranges respectively for students with disabilities achieving 75th growth percentile or higher progress in English language arts. Similarly, the school

achieved 60th and 57th percentile ranks for peer and city ranges for the same group of students for progress in math last year.

- To support frequent collaboration, the principal programmed teacher schedules to ensure that all grades had at least two common planning periods per week as well as a weekly inquiry team meeting time. Furthermore, she assessed team outcomes and provided agendas and protocols to define expectations more clearly and help teams develop collaborative inquiry skills. Teachers report that conversations have shifted from an emphasis on behavior to instruction, and they use protocols to review data, enabling more thoughtful instructional assessment. Teachers shared how communication between general and special education teachers has facilitated their learning regarding lesson modifications and consideration of learning styles to adjust pedagogy. One teacher described how she is “listening to the child” to ascertain student need better. The third grade teacher team explained how after assessing a social studies unit on Nigeria, they realized that students did not understand all the facets of the culture as intended and then, rather than just moving ahead to the next unit, designed another project to ensure student comprehension. The eighth grade team noted that its work influenced the development of graphic organizers and strategies such as chunking when reading, which has helped students improve their understanding and resulted in rising grades. In addition, teachers use inquiry time to plan for implementation of instructional shifts such as closer reading of text and written explanation of problem-solving, and integration of CCLS tasks, exposing students to more cognitively challenging tasks that support demands of CCLS.
- The school has established a safe and respectful learning environment that promotes the academic and personal growth of its students and staff. (1.4)
 - Facing incident numbers in the hundreds before her arrival, the new principal took several immediate actions to improve school environment. She conducted an in-depth analysis disaggregating incident data, instituted middle school beginning and end period attendance-taking and required escorted movement. In conjunction with the school leadership team, she established a cross constituency committee composed of administrators, teachers and parents to promote positive behaviors. Data revealed that behavior incidents occurred across the day in classrooms and transitions, invalidating the previously held perception that the majority of incidents stemmed from lunchtime. This shifted the locus of responsibility from administration to the staff as a whole, solidifying support for the development of a school-wide behavioral intervention plan. Closer monitoring of middle school students established order and fostered an environment more conducive to learning. The cross-constituency committee helped foster trust and community building and evolved into the committee responsible for designing and implementing a long-term strategic Positive Behavior Intervention System. As a result of these actions, incidents have been reduced by over 75%, classroom and hall environments are orderly, and interactions among students and between teachers and students are respectful. Students talk about being “bucket fillers” contributing positively to their school community rather than being “bucket dippers”. They state that they feel safe, that adults care about them and listen to them and respond. In turn, the improved environment has impacted adult learning as well. Teachers report that they feel supported and have a meaningful role. The union representative cites positive changes in school culture acknowledging, “that while we don’t always agree” there have been no grievances under the current principal’s tenure, attesting to an inclusive culture that supports a healthy learning environment.

- The school takes care to align professional development opportunities for both staff and parents, highlighting the emphasis on developing positive behavior and a more rigorous curriculum. Parents particularly expressed appreciation and awe that the principal included them in an instructional walkthrough. As one school leadership team member stated, “Parental involvement is supported, training is ensured and professional development is consistently given,” creating an “atmosphere that parents are equal partners in education.” One result of this growing alignment is that current learning experiences and attitudes promote effective academic and personal behaviors. Students clearly articulate learning from teachers and parents, repeatedly mentioning the word “focus” in describing effort and the importance of maintaining focus in pursuit of personal academic goals. This helps them in developing stamina for activities that they identify as challenging such as persuasive writing, close reading of text and vocabulary work in reading and writing.
- Coherently stated goals drive improvement efforts that are understood and supported by all constituencies. (3.1)
 - The school’s Comprehensive Education Plan encompasses measurable time-bound goals for academic content, communication, environment and professional learning. As a result, there are clear pathways that drive efforts to accelerate students’ academic and social-emotional learning. School actions reflect careful adherence to the plan, including building systems to track progress. Teachers, families and students can speak to school goals as a result of frequent and effective communication around goals for improvement. Teachers can consistently name the school’s foci of multiple entry points, differentiation, higher order questioning and instructional shifts, and they can explain how they are trying to integrate these within their daily practice. Formal parent meetings, committees that include parents, as well as scheduled informal parent breakfasts provide multiple venues to reinforce school goals with families. As a result, parents explain that they increasingly understand the demands of CCLS and the work of the school. Direct communication with students in auditorium meetings cements student buy-in and understanding. Students explain how the principal has shared data with them regarding behavior incidents and goals, and describe the CCLS as preparing them for further study and college. Additionally, all constituencies speak fluently about the school’s work to develop a safe environment. Consequently, clarity of goals and thorough communication have increased awareness, understanding, buy-in and shared responsibility to improve the school’s academic standing.

What the school needs to improve

- Revise curricula to ensure alignment to CCLS so that all students have opportunities to engage in cognitively challenging learning that supports college and career readiness (1.1)
 - The school is implementing CCLS units as per the Citywide Instructional Expectations, choosing to focus on writing standards, and working to modify its America’s Choice literacy and Everyday Math curricula to align with CCLS. However, it has not fully unpacked new standards to illuminate gaps in current curricula. As a result, learning objectives and tasks do not yet reflect the depth of CCLS shifts fully. Teachers cite standards in lesson plans but learning objectives lack explicitness to support critical reading and thinking. In English language arts, text work centers on extracting details and asking students to identify “thin” and “thick” questions to deepen their questioning skills and comprehension. However, students identify “thick” question inconsistently.

Thus, even though teachers are cognizant of CCLS shifts and are making modifications to design more rigorous learning tasks, curricula are not sufficiently aligned to ensure that all students have opportunities to engage in cognitively demanding tasks in order to close the achievement gap.

- Teachers plan differentiated student instructional groups and varied tasks to engage a variety of learners. However, since the practice of teacher teams looking critically at student work is new, the use of student work to guide instructional decisions is currently a developing skill. Teachers reported their observations from individual student work samples but did not share these samples with their colleagues for their input. Thus, opportunities are missed to garner data to refine tasks to ensure that all students engage in cognitively demanding tasks.
- Improve pedagogical planning and questioning to support engagement so that all students employ critical thinking to create meaningful work products. (1.2)
 - Although the school focuses on the competencies of questioning, discussion and student engagement within the Danielson framework, there are inconsistent opportunities for students to think critically and share with peers. Teachers' questions tend to focus on basic comprehension in language arts and social studies and on procedural steps in math. While teachers use turn-and-talk as a discussion strategy, there are infrequent opportunities for students to explain their thinking to peers. Teachers directed questions to students with few requests to elaborate responses. Some students were challenged to create notes, describe an historical event as talk show hosts, or write questions when the text did not provide sufficient explanation, but other students were asked to recall facts and apply algorithms to solve math problems. In addition, while some students were able to verbalize what they were working on and why it was important, others were unsure of tasks and could not explain their work or its purpose. Thus, opportunities across classrooms lack sufficient diversification, high level questioning and occasions to demonstrate understanding, contributing to uneven student engagement and production of meaningful work.
- Improve formative assessment analysis to ensure that targeted adjustments are made regularly to support all students' mastery of content standards. (2.2)
 - Newly instituted baseline assessments are improving the quality of student data available. However, some teachers shared that they do not think these assessments are helpful as they assess untaught skills. Teachers do credit common online assessments and the school's new Google Docs tracking tool with providing them helpful information to track student progress. Although new PID plans have raised the level of assessment analysis and intervention for individual students, teachers are unable to identify succinctly overall trends in student learning. Thus, depth of assessment analysis is not yet sufficiently established to yield specific grade and school-wide trends to consistently implement needed curricular and instructional modifications school-wide.
 - While a variety of strategies to assess student learning, such as listening to students' responses to questions, conferencing, examination of student work products, common assessments, and rubric grades were observed, the application of these strategies varied across the school. Rubrics tended to be generic and their use was not consistent. Students shared that it was usually their teachers who used the rubrics. Teachers circulated to monitor student engagement in tasks but close attention to the content of the student work was not always evident. For example, in an early childhood math class, the teacher was not aware that several students were not able to successfully write number stories using manipulatives to guide their thinking, and in an upper grade math

class the teacher did not recognize that several students could not accurately complete tables in solving for ratio problems. Thus, opportunities are missed to engage students in substantive feedback and to carefully note where students require intervention, thereby limiting pedagogical adjustments needed to meet all students' learning needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: P.S./M.S 042 R. Vernam	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed