

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Martin Van Buren

**High School 26Q435
230-17 HILLSIDE AVENUE
QUEENS
NY 11427**

Principal: SAM SOCHET

**Dates of review: May 8-10, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Flavia Puello-Perdomo**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Martin Van Buren is a high school with 2,178 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 56.6% Black, 24.7% Asian, 13.2% Hispanic, 2.8 White, 1.7% American Indian, and 1% Pacific Islander students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 11% 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 81.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leader has made strategic decisions utilizing resources, financial and human capacity in order to support the school's instructional goals and strengthen student achievement. (1.3)
 - The school administration has established systems and structures to support collaborations between teachers, and the community in order to increase student achievement. The school leader has developed connections with community and civic organizations, as well as educational institutions in the area in order to better support the needs of students. The school instituted a partnership with Queens College to support students with transitioning to high school as well as offering attendance improvement and family outreach. The school is in the process of implementing a law and forensics program with the collaboration of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, as well as a pre-med program with the collaboration of Long Island Jewish Medical Center and Queensborough Community College. In addition to these external collaborations, the school has structured weekly teacher teams meetings focused on improving content mastery and data. The meetings are facilitated by the assistant principals for each content area. Teachers use this time to review results from interim assessments and student work products, which is supporting the development of curriculum and instructional tasks across the content areas. Cabinet meetings are used to review the progress of teacher teams, to discuss practices that strengthen the instructional focus of the school and to monitor other school-wide priorities. Student programming was also enhanced by providing additional opportunities for students to earn credits, recover courses where students were not successful and provide targeted support towards meeting the standardized assessment benchmarks for high school graduation. The school implemented a zero period and after school programs; in addition, they added courses in social studies and English to improve credit accumulation, especially for 11th graders where credit accumulation is a concern to the principal. The school has also begun to focus on reducing class size for Level 1 and 2 students in order to provide more individualized support to struggling students. Moreover, the principal restructured the guidance department so students are now grouped as a cohort, which allows the counselors to better monitor students' progress towards graduation. Furthermore, the school leader increased access to technology, such as Smartboards, across classrooms. As a result, the school is projected to increase credit accumulation between 2-5% across grade level and student work reflects deeper understanding of content and skills needed for college and careers.
- The school leader has developed a systematic approach for observations and teacher supports in order to promote school-wide coherence and improve opportunities for academic growth and teacher development. (4.1)
 - Professional development is offered weekly on topics aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and depth of knowledge. Teachers received professional development on developing higher order questions using Bloom's Taxonomy. The school also used the Skillful Teacher: Framing the Learning to discuss developing a coherent instructional framework. The school administrator developed a calendar of professional development offerings for the year, which is

revised frequently based on the needs of students and teachers. A staff developer from Research for Better Teaching provides support with curriculum and staff development as well as the network. In addition, the principal hired a literacy coach to assist teachers with meeting the literacy needs of students and the demands of the Common Core. Both new and veteran teachers are encouraged to attend professional development outside of the school as well as supported by the content assistance principal who meets with the content team around the instructional focus and supports. These targeted supports are enhancing teacher practice and leading to progress around the school instructional goals.

- The school leader provides effective feedback and frequent observations using the Research for Better Teaching and Essential Elements of Instruction framework. In order to improve the quality of feedback provided to teachers, the administrative team focuses on connecting the feedback to specific student outcomes. During cabinet meetings, the principal reviews previous feedback provided to teachers that did not clearly articulate specific areas for improvement and models feedback practices. Using the results of both formal and informal observation, teachers develop professional development plans at the end of the fall semester, which highlight areas where the teacher excels as well as areas for improvement. Information from teachers' observations and teacher professional development plans is used to develop targeted professional development opportunities for teachers. As a result of this targeted feedback and more specific supports, teachers across the school have shown improvement in pedagogy, and students are receiving targeted supports and scaffolds during the instructional period.
- The school leader has developed a nurturing environment that fosters high expectations with well-coordinated supports to promote a culture of learning and mutual respect and accountability for all students and adults. (1.4)
 - The school leaders focus on improving safety and respect for students and staff, as well as increasing student voice by creating a sense of community and developing a team approach to discipline and safety. Teachers receive support with classroom management strategies in order to minimize classroom distractions. The principal also focuses on developing strong teacher morale by implementing an open door policy and by meeting one on one with teachers as he transitioned into his role. The administrative team conducts morning rounds and attends student's lunch periods and dismissals in order to make connections with students and ensure that positive interactions are taking place throughout the school. Parents expressed that they have noticed an improvement in the school culture and believe administration is making a concerted effort to bring the community together. Consequently, the school has demonstrated a reduction of level three behavioral infractions and improvement in the overall school environment and student attendance by about 2% from the previous year.
 - The school leaders are implementing systems and programs to support the social and emotional needs of students while beginning to improve academic outcomes. The school implemented a Take 5 Initiative, where each staff member was responsible for looking after five students that were previously disengaged or not excelling academically due to challenges in their personal life or academic needs. They implemented individual case conferencing and restructured the guidance department so counselors now follow students until they graduate, which supports personalization and academic growth of students. Counselors are now meeting more frequently with students in order

to review students' academic records. The school also hired an additional guidance counselor to support the needs of English Language Learners. Twelfth grade parents are invited to come and meet their counselors either after school or Saturday to discuss students' progress. The implementation of these new strategies has helped with developing a positive school tone and sense of ownership in the community.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the development of curriculum maps so instruction is engaging and challenging to all students including English language learners and students with disabilities and promotes postsecondary readiness. (1.1)
 - Teachers develop CCLS aligned curriculum tasks informed by the Depth of Knowledge framework through collaboration within the content areas. The school identifies key learning standards and adapts curriculum across content to ensure higher levels of achievement and understanding for all students. Administrators monitor the development of curriculum maps and units to ensure a rigorous and coherent curriculum. However, the instructional tasks included in the lessons and units reviewed did not always scaffold activities to meet the needs of students. Lesson examined did not always embed higher order thinking task or addressed the instructional shift required by the Common Core Learning standards. For instance, the school is focused on developing skills related to stating claims and counterclaims and this was reflected in one English language arts lesson plan where students were expected to write an argumentative essay on music's effect on teenagers. The lesson plan did not include specific strategies to help students that struggled to introduce and explain the evidence they cited to support their view point. Consequently, student work products of this task showed evidence that students were not able to support their counterclaim. In addition, in a math lesson plan students were asked to complete a performance task on parallelograms with limited guidance in terms of the expected outcome; they were simply instructed to complete their task together as it would be graded as a test. As a result students are not always engaged in meaningful and rigorous academic task that support postsecondary readiness.
- Continue to develop consistent classroom practices across all content areas so that student learning needs are supported and they are able to engage in rigorous tasks that promote higher order thinking and mastery of content and skills. (1.2)
 - The school leader focuses on making sure that lessons are congruent across classrooms, that all teachers have clear and appropriate objectives, on-demand tasks and engaging student discussions, and that they are assessing whether or not students are meeting these objectives. However, these expected practices were not consistently evident across classrooms. In some of the lessons observed, the questions posted did not support classroom discussion or allow for opportunities for real life application. In addition, not all lessons were scaffolded and, for the most part, students were expected to complete the same activities with limited opportunities for differentiation for both struggling students and those students that could engage in more advanced tasks. Moreover, in only a few classes were students observed analyzing complex text, and in some instances, were simply summarizing what they were reading, which led to missed opportunities to engage students in higher level order thinking hence lessening

the alignment between teacher's practices and the school's expectations for learning. As a result, students are not always challenged and engaged by learning experiences leading to meaningful work products.

- Continue to develop a systematic approach to gathering and analyzing assessment data in order to adjust curriculum and instructional tasks so that learning is relevant and appropriate to all subgroups including ELLs and Students with disabilities. (2.2)
 - The school implements interim assessments across content areas. The administration and teachers then review the results of these formative assessments during teacher team meeting to identify skills where students are deficient. The school is beginning to use this information to adjust curriculum and instruction and to better support the needs of their sub-groups. Although teacher teams are analyzing student outcomes on interim assessments, it was not evident that the assessment cycle is used effectively to track progress or to monitor and revise supports for specific sub-groups. In addition, the principal explained that teachers need additional support with offering meaningful feedback to students during class and with formative assessments. Prior to this year, teachers' feedback was mainly focused on what students were not able to complete rather than on supporting student self-assessment and improvement. Only about half of the teachers are consistently using rubrics to guide students to meet the expected outcomes on instructional tasks. An administrator explained, "Teachers in the math department are new to rubrics. They never used rubrics in the past." In addition, the school implemented an online grading system, but staff members are not consistently reporting student data and outcomes. A parent explained, "The grading system is there, but they don't use it. It is not mandatory. For the most part science teachers are reporting their grades. If I need to find out how my child is doing, I need to contact the assistant principal." Consequently, teachers are not able to adjust curriculum to meet the needs of students across all subgroups and the assessments practices have not been able to fully support the instructional vision of the school.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Martin Van Buren	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