

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Van Nest Academy

11x498

1640 Bronxdale Avenue

Bronx, NY 10462

NY 10462

Principal: Carol Ann Gilligan

Dates of review: November 29 – 30, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth A. White

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Van Nest is a K-8 school with 348 students from kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 11% Black, 66% Hispanic, 13% White, and 10% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 94.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's positive culture supports school-wide goals resulting in an environment conducive to learning for students and adults. (1.4)
 - As exemplified in the latest school Learning Environment Survey (LES) the school provides a nurturing environment that encourages students to want to succeed. The school's culture reflects a high level of respect. "Respect For All" is the school's mantra that they pledge each school day.

RESPECT FOR ALL PLEDGE

I want to be a member of a school that lets me be who I am.
I can be my color, my religion, my gender; I can love whoever I choose,
I can have my challenges and I can be ME.
I can expect to be respected.
To have that safety in my school...I must give it.
All of us must—teachers, students...everyone.
So we pledge.....

Well-kept school facilities and vibrant hall and in-class bulletin boards displaying student work promote student achievement. Both parents and students feel that students are known by adults and they can seek and receive social emotional support and assistance as needed to improve their academic performance. Parents state that administration is approachable and resolves issues with expediency. Teachers are accessible and "compassionate". As one parent shared, "They concentrate on each child". Teachers often support students during their 'off duty' hours. Furthermore, utilizing the *Six Pillars of Character Education* curriculum the character development of students is supported and tailored to meet the individual needs of students. For example the skill of organization and responsibility is supported through the use of student planners. In this way students are guided and accountable for the management of their assignments and deadlines while developing habits for college and career readiness. This positive atmosphere where school-based adults, students and families want to learn and grow has led to buy-in and satisfaction by the whole school community. As a result, Parent Association participation has increased and the school has earned the distinction of being recognized as a NYC *Respect for All School*.

- The school effectively promotes high expectations resulting in community based support and accountability. (3.4)
 - School leaders held a staff retreat this past August where teachers were familiarized with expectations for the upcoming school year. This included the Danielson Framework, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) task scaffolding rubric as well as the vision for interdisciplinary curricula alignment to CCLS. Since then teachers were introduced to web-based organizers to capture classroom trends resulting in student outcome data that is readily accessible for making instructional decisions and communicating information to families. As a result, teachers are embracing this year's citywide instructional expectations thereby ensuring engaging curricular practices that promote academic achievement for all learners.

- The school has several avenues of communication to ensure that parents are informed and engaged in understanding school expectations and student progress. The school makes families aware of grade level expectations and efforts to prepare students for college and career readiness through workshops, school meetings and activities. Through the school's partnership with the Bronx River Alliance and Botanical Gardens, continuous opportunities are provided for students and parents to attend fieldtrips where families participate in data collection, investigations with scientists and professionals in various careers. In this way, parents participate as students apply their classroom-based knowledge to real world experiences. Parents receive information about their children via teacher conversations, the robust and growing Parents' Association, report cards, and *EChalk & Engrade* reporting systems. Parents state that communication with families about progress towards school wide goals is on-going. In this way parents are enabled to participate as active partners in supporting student achievement.
- School curricula integrate core content areas with literacy instruction to effectively align with the cognitive demand of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) resulting in tasks that promote deep thinking and cross-curricular connections. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty make purposeful choices about curricular decisions aligned to State standards using a gap analysis of skills based on past student performance and school-based benchmark assessments. Curricula is planned through professional learning teams (PLT) that target a cross section of students to ensure that academic tasks and data are focused on students with a range of learning needs using Danielson as the guiding framework. As a result, the school has developed coherent thematic units of study that focus on interdisciplinary writing tasks. For example, in grade 8 students were asked to defend NBC meteorologist Boyle's claim that the movement of planetary bodies can be used to predict an eclipse. From a NASA website, students used a geological map of the U.S.A. showing the impact of the previous night's lunar eclipse to determine what region of the country an eclipse can be seen. In groups they used past science lab notes and evidence from text to support their opinion about Boyle's claim. This has led to successful engagement of a diversity of learners while ensuring that curricular strategies are aligned to CCLS and support persuasive writing across curricula.
 - Since curriculum across the school encourages students to demonstrate their thinking through habits of writing, the school's efforts have led to work products that encourage ownership by requiring explanation of thinking. For example, in third grade the *Writing to Explain Ordering Numbers* task asks students to explain their step-by-step thinking process in mathematics. The assessment rubric that accompanies the task indicates the student performance level based on both writing and CCLS in math, with teacher commentary on successes and next steps for growth. This has resulted in positive improvement in the way students demonstrate their conceptual understanding of subject matter. In addition, this has ensured that tasks are appropriately rigorous with assessment rubrics and feedback identifying the strengths and needs of students.

- Across classrooms teachers use on-going assessment practices to modify instructional approaches as needed resulting in improved student outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school has placed heavy emphasis on the use and analysis of data using tools like *Waterford Learning* student reports and has accurate knowledge of student achievement levels. Assessment practices around review of student work are regularly evaluated against expectations based on key standards using tools such as the *Multi Text Guided Reading Plan and Assessment Sheet* and school-wide rubrics that document areas of strength and weakness in literacy and core subjects with actionable next steps for student improvement. Additionally, students are provided with self-reflection tools to assess their own learning. Teachers also analyze Acuity and Teacher's College (TC) interim test data to pinpoint students' academic strengths and skill deficits enabling them to set next steps for instruction. Teachers supplement summative data with individual student conference notes and observation anecdotes to continually revise student instructional groups. This effective analyses and use of ongoing assessments results in improved student progression towards mastery for all students.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the evaluation of instructional practice with effective feedback to teachers that results in targeted promotion of professional growth. (4.1)
 - Administrators have implemented a schedule of classroom visits to provide regular feedback to teachers regarding their practice. However, formative feedback offered is inconsistently linked to best practices and student impact with a clear timeline for follow up support as needed. In addition, there is not always a clear distinction between what is an expectation verses what should be a celebrated growth point. For example, as a "Glow" one administrator's formative teacher feedback read, "You did an assessment. There was evidence of planning." These are examples of expectations. On another feedback document it read, "...you asked students to explain or justify their answers." This is aligned to professional development efforts based on CCLS and is rightly celebrated as a growth point. Another example of formative feedback read as a "Grow", "I look forward to seeing how differentiation is provided." However, the feedback did not indicate when or if any supports would be provided. As a result, next steps for development are unclear limiting the impact of feedback on teacher growth and accountability.
 - Additionally, while the school has selected Danielson as the framework to guide efforts on teaching expectations the tenets of the framework are not consistently used when offering both formal and informal evaluations. This limits the quality of feedback and alignment to the research-based framework of expectations thus reducing the impact of professional development on improved teacher pedagogy.
- Devise a formal system to regularly monitor and evaluate processes for capturing current school wide data with greater efficiency in identifying school wide trends in order to enhance the fidelity of school-wide initiatives. (5.1)

- Teacher teams and individual teachers make good use of tools like *SuccessMaker*, a web-based platform to gather and assess classroom and individual student data to determine growth in ELA and math. Teams regularly share performance results for those students who they have targeted, and each individual teacher also provides information to their students and families. However ongoing school-wide data is not yet sufficiently organized to allow for a more accessible view of current aggregated trends across the school particularly for students who scored level 1 on past summative assessments. This limits the school's ability to efficiently aggregate and identify emerging school-wide trends and impedes the opportunity to make timely adjustments (e.g. to student supports) based on student outcome data to enhance school-wide processes.
- The school utilizes outside consultants, an internal coach as well as peer mentoring to support teacher practice. However, a transparent system to determine the effectiveness of support initiatives to improve teacher practice has not been fully developed. For example, while teachers conduct peer intervisitations and offer collegial feedback, a system to align this formative feedback to school-wide professional development efforts has not yet been fully implemented. The result is a lack of a systemic approach to gauge teacher development over time thus limiting the ability to determine the impact of pedagogical initiatives on teacher practice and provide appropriate teacher supports to foster continuous professional growth and accountability.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Van Nest Academy	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