

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Marta Valle High School

High School 01M509

**145 STANTON STREET
MANHATTAN
NY, 10002**

Principal: Jannett Bailey

**Dates of review: May 5-6, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Marta Valle High School is a high school with 401 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 41% Black, 49% Hispanic, 1.7% White, and 6.5% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 79.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders have established an approach to culture building through professional development and student support structures that result in a safe and supportive environment for student and adult learning. (1.4)
 - Through formal conversations involving all constituents, the school community developed and revised a vision of school culture that honors a set of five core values: respect, leadership, diligence, integrity and service. The new leader has created structures, such as a daily morning meeting with all teachers and weekly professional learning opportunities, as well as an open door policy to create an environment of respect and trust that promotes teacher voice and leadership. This has fostered a high degree of collaboration amongst adults. This was evident when one English teacher shared a video of herself during a team meeting to demonstrate one of her practices and received respectful, frank and helpful feedback from colleagues. Team meetings typically involve the sharing of student and teacher work around a problem of practice and “instructional workshopping,” where teachers co-construct curricular materials for courses they share. Teachers attempt to get to know student needs well in formal and informal ways, that is, through both conversation as well as departmental surveys that help teachers understand what kinds of projects and topics students find are interesting and what they find difficult. The school is investing efforts to promote student leadership and voice with a view to expanding successful initiatives next year. For example, the school has partnered with the Center for Supportive Schools to promote healthy decision making, problem solving and respect for individual differences through an advisory program. Two faculty advisors and a group of 12th graders have been trained, and seniors, who earn course credit for their participation, conduct participatory advisory activities with freshman to explore positive values and decision-making. These practices have contributed to creating an environment where students and teachers say they feel welcome and respected.
- A careful data-based analysis of academic and social-emotional needs is reflected in goals and action plans that enable the school to advance a coherent vision of school improvement. (3.1)
 - After a change in leadership this fall, the school undertook a comprehensive review of its data and practices, engaging all constituents in conversations around their own feelings and beliefs, to arrive at a set of core values to which the school’s instructional goals and action plans align. The school has adopted the term “chasing 66,” to reflect its aspiration to increase the graduation rate from last year’s 31% to 66%. To achieve this goal, the school is implementing action plans aligned to its instructional goals, which include promoting the common practice of looking at student work and data, in order to adjust instruction and establishing common understandings of effective instructional practices, through norming exercises based on the Danielson Framework. In addition, the school is implementing its action plans related to developing a rigorous curriculum aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) supported by scaffolds and multiple entry points. These action plans are well supported through professional development provided by school leaders, four external consultants, the school’s literacy coach, as well as through inquiry work conducted by

department and grade-level teams. To measure the impact of these changes, the school analyzes scholarship reports, Regents passing rates and results on formative and summative assessments. The school also tracks student academic performance in charts that depict each cohort, divided into three groups, to plan targeted interventions. After a mid-year progress check, the school re-aligned its academic priorities, reprogramming the entire school to reflect the notable impact of its focused work on literacy, which enabled the majority of juniors to pass the English Regents one semester ahead of time, and reinforcing attention to social studies through daily common planning time and additional professional development for this department. A very large Algebra integrated co-teaching class was sub-divided into two smaller classes to ensure that the highest needs students receive sufficient attention, thus student performance has subsequently improved. The involvement of students, parents and teachers in discussions around the new leader's vision of instruction and organization results in high levels of cooperation in implementing the desired changes.

- School leaders prioritize the observation of teaching practice to provide targeted feedback and identify next steps, resulting in improvements in pedagogical practice across the school. (4.1)
 - Using the Danielson Framework for Teaching as a guide, the principal and two assistant principals devoted considerable attention to visiting classrooms and looking at student work together, during the first few months of the academic year, in order to calibrate their understandings of good instructional practice and desired student outcomes. These initial visits informed the planning of teachers' individual goals and learning plans. Having normed their interpretations, cycles of formal and informal observations commenced, which are followed by very specific oral and written actionable feedback aligned to the rubric. Recommendations for next steps to improve formative assessment include prompting teachers to give homework that provides background knowledge to anticipate the next day's lesson, to post anchor charts from the day's activity for future reference, and to record student responses during conferencing and discussion to track progress. As a result of feedback and the shared vision of instruction, teachers are able to cite specific ways they are aligning their practice to the expectations of the Danielson Framework. For example, a literacy teacher is working on "backing off", teaching from the back of the room and implementing small group protocols to deliver more ownership of classroom discussion to students. Math teachers state they are requiring students to justify answers in writing instead of allowing them to "guess and check." The shared understanding of good instruction and a clear instructional model supported by individual feedback and professional support is thus impacting positively on pedagogical practices across the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Align curricula and academic tasks across all departments to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the instructional shifts so that students are consistently engaged in rigorous learning experiences. (1.1)
 - The school is working to revise curricula in all content areas to ensure alignment to the State content standards and the Common Core Learning Standards. This work is most advanced in the English Department, where teachers use a backwards-design template and are purposeful in their approach to integrating the instructional shifts,

emphasizing the support claims with evidence from credible sources. Tasks emphasize literary devices since mastery of these standards is necessary for success on the current English Regents exams. This focus is reinforced extremely well in the English as second language (ESL) courses, where the teacher plans well designed scaffolds adapted from the EngageNY modules for thoughtfully selected and meaningful topics. In that course, students applied their knowledge of literacy devices in creative narratives of considerable volume and quality. In mathematics, the school commenced the year using materials aligned to the CCLS, but has since reduced those efforts in order to address the evident gaps in learning. Most tasks are drawn from old Regents exams, so students are exposed to very few problem-solving situations and rarely explain their answers. One student described how her physics teacher used old Regents items creatively to increase their cognitive demand: “We had to ‘think like a teacher’ and write explanations in a way that a student with no knowledge could understand.” However, most tasks in science and social studies courses lack rigor. In a Global History class, the ambitious aim “How did the Crusades affect Europe and the Middle East in the long and short term?” was not sufficiently addressed by the assignment of two short quotes in a text book that students read independently before typing the three textbook questions in their computers and attempting to answer them. An assignment on food chains and food webs in a living environment class was indistinguishable from a similar task in the Grade 5 curriculum. In another social studies class, the teacher interpreted the document and while purporting to align it to the standard of determining meaning from context, the teacher jotted in the definitions on the students’ text. Across the school, the crafting of rigorous tasks with suitable scaffolds for students at different levels is an emerging practice, consequently students are not yet fully exposed to expectations that promote college and career readiness in all content areas.

- Leverage existing work around the school’s model of instruction to improve the alignment between beliefs and pedagogical practice to consistently engage students in critical thinking opportunities across all content areas. (1.2)
 - Across the school, lessons reveal that teachers are invested in the Danielson Framework and the school’s “Gradual Release of Responsibility” workshop model of instruction, as all lessons involved the modeling of skills and procedures, followed by a shared example and then group or independent work. In addition, there were deliberate attempts to involve students in discussions about shared texts. In many classes, lesson hooks were designed to help students deeply understand the objective. For example, in an English class, students listened to two starkly different versions of a popular song to understand how tone affects perception, to provide an entry point into the writer’s craft. Although teachers say they are focusing on “holding back” and “getting off the stage,” practices that encourage student voice were less evident. In classes where students did interact, all discussions were mediated by the teacher, with variable levels of results. In an ESL class, many students were animated as they shared the research questions they had generated and asked and answered questions of each other. However, in a math class, one student shared his solution on the board, but by explaining it from his seat, not all students were able to follow the procedure. In a social studies class, the aim of understanding the causes of protest in China was derailed by the teacher’s introduction of the concept of “fighting without fighting,” resulting in one group asking, “What’s she talking about?” This inferential concept was not addressed in the low level task, which required students to list five reasons why

people marched on Tiananmen Square. Across some classrooms, tasks lack scaffolded complexity and students lack exposure to protocols that facilitate structured interaction. Consequently, there are missed opportunities for all students to think and consistently participate at high levels.

- Improve the alignment of interim assessments practices and grading policies across content areas and grades so that students self-assess and work more purposefully towards mastery. (2.2)
 - All teachers undertake some form of ongoing assessment, either through individual check-ins and exit slips. In some cases, this leads to adjustments to the lesson. For example, a geometry teacher probed for understanding, readjusted the time to maximize learning and pushed students to explain responses using mathematical language. However, in a history class, checks were whole group and most students did not respond. Scoring criteria for evaluating written work are not yet normed within and across departments, in part due to co-existence of some Common Core-aligned rubrics and the holistic Regents-aligned rubrics. However, even in examining Regents-based thematic essays, teachers do not agree on scoring criteria, such that some teachers evaluate grammatically correct work as strong, even when the work only partially develops all aspects of the task. This prevents students from understanding and working towards high expectations. Some teachers are developing approaches to mastery-based grading, recording in a continual fashion when students have demonstrated their competence on particular skills. In these cases, teachers use the NAME (not evident, approaching, meeting or exceeding) acronym to record mastery, but this is an emerging practice. Most teachers offer students a “test correction” option, which allows them to study and retake items they answered incorrectly. While this is intended to encourage reflection and identification of next steps, students say they see it as an easy way to boost their grade. The absence of common grading policies and meaningful feedback to students that enables them to understand their strengths and weaknesses reduces the utility of assessment practices to meet students’ learning needs across all disciplines.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Marta Valle High School	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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?		X					
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?		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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			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