



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Walt Whitman, M.S. 246**

**Middle School K246**

**72 Veronica Place  
Brooklyn  
NY 11226**

**Principal: Mr. Bently Warrington**

**Date of review: December 5, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

## The School Context

Walt Whitman, M.S. 246 is a middle school with 603 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 84% Black, 13% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 24% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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### Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts. Academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data and consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

### Impact

School leaders and faculty make purposeful decisions to build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWD).

### Supporting Evidence

- Over the past three years, M.S. 246 transitioned its English language arts (ELA) from using Teachers College units of study and The College Board's *Springboard*<sup>®</sup> program to using *Expeditionary Learning* modules. In mathematics, the school transitioned from McGraw Hill Publishing's *IMPACT Mathematics* courses to *Connected Mathematics Project 3* (CMP3) units. "We try to engage students in challenging and rigorous mathematics that speaks to the Common Core as well as through contextually complex problems of the real world," said one teacher.
- Principal Warrington defined rigor as, "...instruction that allows students to achieve mastery in the State standards and beyond in learning." He added that every August and September, administrators and teachers engage in planning units of study and related professional development that will increase the level of instructional rigor. During the school year, teachers serving as Peer Instructional Coaches (PICs) oversee the curriculum modification process. PICs also serve on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to adjust the pacing of content based on their students and tasks. Administrators regularly review lesson plans to ensure curricular alignment.
- The school's pacing calendar for each CMP3 unit incorporates the relevant Common Core Standards, mathematics shifts, assessments, and "I Can Statements" as supporting targets. In addition to these components, the pacing calendar for the *Expeditionary Learning* modules also references the central texts for each lesson, the anchor charts (e.g., the structure of literary analysis) and protocols (e.g., chalk talk or concentric circles) to be used. For example, an eighth-grade student syllabus for the ELA unit focused on a book by the Vietnam-born American author Thanhha Lai entitled "Inside Out & Back Again," about a family forced to move from war in Saigon to peace in Alabama, and the main character's loss and regaining of her academic and social confidence. The unit's essential question was "What common themes are universal to the refugee experience?" Each student received a syllabus that included a list of each assignment and assessment to be administered during the marking period, the grading policy, pages covered in each lesson along with instructions for gathering textual evidence, an annotation rubric, a focus on vocabulary, and calendar of activities for the entire unit. Within this syllabus is a description of Peer Development Sessions, which provide students with the opportunity to become experts at a skill or concept and to learn from each other.

## Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best.

### Impact

Teaching practices are informed by Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching and the Common Core instructional shifts. However, student work products and discussions in some classes reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have discussed ways to encourage higher-order thinking during PLC meetings. During lesson study, teachers collaboratively identified questioning and discussion techniques as pedagogical skill for strengthening school wide. School administration engaged the professional development services of the Center for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE) to help address this area of focus. The Instructional Cabinet, comprised of school administrators and PICs, regularly look for evidence of the PLC discussions within classroom practice. Teachers were given an opportunity to self-identify their area(s) of strength and area(s) for learning, corresponding to components of instruction on the Framework for Teaching. The school has a varied agenda of professional development to address the areas for learning. For example, two teachers were trained recently in Wilson Reading System's® Just Words® program, a multi-sensory decoding and spelling program, which they turn keyed with other teachers. Teachers have also received support focused on writing instruction from their network. Across the school, teachers incorporate Frayer Model graphic organizers for word analysis and vocabulary building.
- In a grade 8 mathematics class focused on equivalent expressions, the teacher used a SMARTboard to lead the class in solving a problem. The teacher then asked students to use a given equation for profit based on the number of visitors to an amusement park's concession stand to predict the number of visitors based on the probability of rain. To solve, students needed to understand how to substitute the expression for the number of visitors based on the probability of rain for the variable representing the number of visitors in the profit equation. The stated learning objective was "I can find some ways to combine one or more expressions or equations to create a new expression or equation." Students used scientific calculators and individually graphed their solutions. Students also referenced a rubric as a self-assessment that categorized (a) their understanding of the problem, (b) the strategies, reasoning, procedures, and accuracy of their solution, and (c) their use of mathematics language and visuals in their explanation.
- Multiple entry points are a continuing focus for strengthening lessons to engage all learners in classrooms. "We believe that all students vary in their interests, abilities and needs and that these differences should be accommodated through a variety of programs, activities or teaching methodologies," said Principal Warrington. "We start with the research to understand what it says. We've started to do some work with teachers on scaffolding, particularly for the ELLs and SWDs."

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

Actionable feedback regarding student achievement is provided to students and teachers. The results of common assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### Supporting Evidence

- M.S. 246 uses DataCation's online PupilPath system to collect, store, and analyze student data and to share this information with students and their parents. This system provides teachers with immediate access to actionable benchmark and formative assessment results to monitor student results and inform instructional planning. Parents also have online access to their child's academic progress, grades, assignments, attendance, and teacher-parent messaging through the school's online portal to DataCation's PupilPath application. "It's a very comprehensive system that allows you to go from item analysis to groups of kids flexibly," said Principal Warrington. "We did staff training on PupilPath in October and everyone uses this system this year for consistency."
- As Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) the school selected and trained teachers on how to use and interpret Degrees of Reading Power® (DRP), a measurement system used to understand students' reading comprehension ability, to monitor student reading progress, and to determine the efficacy of the school's curricular and interventions. "We're looking to reprogramming in January so that we can regroup those students who score low on the DRP," said Principal Warrington.
- The school uses the Scoring and Norming Anchors Protocol (SNAP) as well as the Tuning Protocol to study student work and performance-based assessments with Common Core-aligned rubrics. M.S. 246's School Implementation Team (SIT) actively reviews qualitative and quantitative data with the goal of moving students into Least Restrictive Environments (LREs). Principal Warrington reported that four students have recently moved into an LRE.
- A teacher accessed Carnegie Learning's *Cognitive Tutor* on the SMARTboard at the beginning of his grade 6 mathematics class to discuss Skill-O-Meter reports with students from the prior day's session on the topic of scaling ratios. Students use these online Skill-O-Meter reports to keep track of their math skills in real time as they work through a problem. Students also have 24-hour access to the school's *MYOn*® program, a digital library which tracks student reading activity and growth based on interest and ability. This information is accessible online by parents as well.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and staff have established a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness. Families are provided ongoing feedback to understand student progress towards those expectations.

### Impact

A diversity of learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, has access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has about 40 eighth-grade students in the Medgar Evers College Pipeline Initiative, which was designed by the college to educate and train middle and high school students for college success. Through this initiative, M.S. 246 students are exposed to such disciplines and fields as medicine, robotics, digital technology, investment banking, neurology, and agriculture. Eighth-grade students also have opportunities to take high school Regents mathematics and/or science exams to accelerate the achievement of high school credit. Seventh-grade students completed Career Clusters Interest Surveys in November to inform their exploration of different careers in such sectors as health, hospitality, finance, public administration, technology, agriculture, architecture, education, and business. To promote bonds between students and adults, the school introduced a club period on Fridays during eighth period (1:30-2:20 pm), during which students can choose from a variety of club activities that promote social and emotional learning. New this school year is a student advisory council with seven students selected by teachers based on student leadership skills. Students have also taken on such leadership roles as becoming “captains” on each school floor to monitor the behavior of their peers. The school added another full-time guidance counselor, whom Principal Warrington says is “young and attuned to the students of today.”
- Multiple opportunities for students and their families are provided to visit college campuses and participate in advisory workshops for high-school selection. Parents serving on the School Leadership Team participated in a five-week “Boot Camp” in July and August 2014, during which ideas for enhancing parent engagement was discussed. The team subsequently shared ideas generated at this training at a meeting of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Parents reported that attendance is relatively good at the school’s PTA meetings. There are a high percentage of parents who are immigrants and information is translated into five languages and there are translators at each meeting. “When we meet, we talk about issues like peer pressure,” said one parent. “We have raffles during the PTA meeting as incentives for attendance.” Another parent said, “The language barrier is a major problem for some parents of Caribbean backgrounds; they’re shy and it keeps them from getting in involved and interacting. I’m speaking from experience.”
- The school has an education and youth development partnership with CAMBA, a nonprofit organization that provides students with homework help, literacy development, socialization and recreation. One parent mentioned that this program has helped her daughter’s reading score to increase.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

### Impact

The instructional capacity of teachers has been strengthened. Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Session goals on an agenda for the eighth-grade teacher team meeting session were “To address supports for students moved to a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)—a Regents class—to bridge the gaps between their current levels of performance and new demands of Common Core-aligned Regents curriculum. Facilitation of teacher team meetings by team members varies based on the problem of practice presented on the agenda. Consistent with a discussion protocol, a teacher presented work folders of a cadre of students who would be transitioning so that they will be more cognitively and socially challenged. In an overview of the student’s academic performance and social acuity, the teacher stated that these students, “...represented the top 10% in performance within their self-contained classrooms, have scored well on mathematics exams, have a good work ethic, and are self-starters so are able to initiate work on their own. Team members discussed (a) gaps and trends in the current work of these students, (b) the systems and intervention in place to support students, and (c) the monitoring systems for teachers of this student cohort to track progress.
- “Whenever you sit together in a group and look at student work without prejudice...without implications towards your teaching, the result is that your individual pedagogy is improved,” said a member of the eighth grade teacher team. “Based on data, we realize that across content areas students lack stamina and critical thinking,” said another teacher. “As a team we focus on problem solving skills, scaffolds, and organizers so that students can think deeply about anything we present to them. We discuss ways to implement ideas to improve outcomes, and then go back to our classrooms to implement. Recently, we focused on annotating text, and it was helpful to hear the struggle that students have in different content areas. Together, we came up with an Annotation Rubric which can be used in all classes and serves as a common language.”
- Teachers were surveyed about their PLC interests and strengths in October 2014. The school has a variety of leadership roles for teachers including serving as ambassadors, demonstration teachers, and PICs. Teacher leaders turnkey and facilitate professional development and share best practices with other teachers. Teachers also actively serve on the School Implementation Team, which focuses on students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).