Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Robert Vernam

Elementary-Middle School Q042

488 Beach 66 Street
Queens
NY 11692

Principal: Patricia Finn

Date of review: February 13, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Mary Barton

The School Context

Robert Vernam is an elementary/middle school with 705 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 70% Black, 24% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87.9%.

School Quality Criteria

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

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school engages in structured professional team collaborations using an inquiry approach that focus on tracking progress of students as well as promote shared leadership and have a voice in key decisions**.**

Impact
Through the work of teacher teams and teacher leadership, there has been an increase in teacher capacity resulting in improved student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet on Monday afternoons. Teams have agendas and sign-in sheets and use protocols around looking at student work tracking student progress. Teachers then revise lessons and unit plans to reflect student needs.

- In viewing a grade 3 teacher team focused on a Ready Gen module, teachers were looking at results from four formative assessments from Ready Gen, grouping students into high, middle and low groups for future lessons. Furthermore, they looked at a focus group of students and determined their performance and needs. The team then decided on strategies that would help students including using post-it notes in the text, highlighting text and turning and telling a partner a fact from the text. They then selected a formative assessment to use for the next module and determined it would be tracked around a particular English language arts standard. Next steps would include modifying a unit map and checking student progress.

- This year, the school participates in the Learning Partners Program (LPP) as a partner school. A team of teachers were selected to participate in the program as lead teachers. They facilitate professional learning with the faculty sharing the learning they have gained from the LPP schools they are affiliated with and have an action plan with delineated goals and benchmarks. The LPP teachers have spearheaded changes in lesson planning across the school and helping teachers to account for every minute using a timer during lessons along with the use across the school of white board organization to display key lesson components so that all students know what is expected of them upon entering the classroom.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing

Findings
The school is in the process of aligning assessments to the curricula, using on-going assessments and grading practices, and analyzing information on student outcomes.

Impact
There are common assessments in place; however, results are inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction, and provide actionable feedback to students. Across classrooms, teacher assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of on-going checks for understanding resulting in inconsistent adjustments to instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Rubrics are used throughout the school to assess student work, particularly in writing, and sometimes serve as the basis for feedback. Writing displayed on corridor bulletin boards evidenced the writing process by including graphic organizers, drafts and the final product. However, while rubrics are used to score the writing, the feedback provided to students does not consistently provide meaningful and actionable feedback. For example, students were given feedback such as “watch your spelling” and “use correct punctuation.” Additionally, the wording of the rubric language was not consistently understandable to students. In speaking to students, students could not consistently speak with an understanding of the rubric language. This inconsistency of feedback and/or inability to access rubric language and expectations prohibits students from knowing their next learning steps.

- Teachers are in the process of developing modes for checking for understanding. One example is the development of “entrance and exit slips”. Before this year, lessons were not always paced properly and teachers, therefore, did not have the opportunity to check for understanding on a regular basis. This process is still in development as teachers in four of the seven classrooms visited did not check for understanding of the lesson viewed. This omission limits teachers from accurately assessing student learning and thus, adjusting lessons and units to meet student needs.

- Teachers are using a Ready Gen summative assessment tracker to show student growth over time and to determine the needs of various groups of students. Teachers also use a Writing Matters tracker which tracks student progress on all writing units. Teachers have also formed focus groups of students who are the 8-10 students who fall in the bottom third along students in particular sub-groups not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Teachers work with these students in small groups providing targeted instruction.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Access for all learners to curricula and academic tasks is limited and an emphasis on rigorous habits and higher order skills is inconsistent across grades, subjects and for English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrating the instructional shifts.

Impact
The school inconsistently ensures that engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula and academic tasks in all subjects are accessible to a variety of learners and aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts.

Supporting Evidence

- While the school utilizes English language arts (ELA) Common Core aligned programs Ready Gen and Code X and math programs Go Math and Connected Math Program 3 (CMP3) as the basis of their planning, the instructional shifts were not evident as fully integrated into curricula and unit plans. In reviewing artifacts, for example, academic language exposure in both ELA and math was absent from some plans and from some classrooms as support to students. Also, students were not consistently exposed to the staircase of complexity as some tasks were not broken down in gradual steps for students to access.

- In reviewing student tasks, the evidence of rigorous tasks was inconsistent across classrooms .particularly for math instruction. There was an inconsistency in the opportunities for students, for example, to grapple with multi step word problems and supports so that students in subgroups could access tasks. In some lessons, there was no distinction between groups of students or varied entry points.

- In reviewing units, on some grades and in some subjects, curricula and unit maps are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, but inconsistently provide entry points for English language learners and students with disabilities.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the *Danielson Framework for Teaching* and the instructional shifts. In a majority of classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact
In a majority of classrooms, there is an uneven engagement in challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher order thinking skills in student work products, including the work of English language learners and students with disabilities. Student work products and classroom discussions in a majority of classrooms are inconsistently challenging.

Supporting Evidence

- While work has been done this school year to focus teachers around planning and timing in lesson plans, questions posed during most lessons viewed were at Depth of Knowledge level 1. For example, in a grade 2 classroom visited, the teacher was reading aloud a book about Frederick Law Olmstead and his design for New York City parks. She asked basic recall questions and did not give students the opportunity to ask questions even though they wished to explore the topic further. The omission of challenging questions did not allow students to extend their learning consistently.

- In a grade 6 English language arts classroom, students were seated in a whole class circle for a discussion comparing two texts they read. While the teacher had a system for ensuring that particular students would not dominate the discussion and to hear a variety of voices, the teacher dominated much of the discussion time and, as a result, not all students were engaged in the task.

- In visiting classrooms, there was an inconsistency of meeting students at their entry points. In a special education classroom, the teacher read a text aloud to the students and then assigned them to groups using data from the lesson the day before. In a general education classroom, the students were all working on the same writing task with no supports in the classroom to assist students and no modifications to the task to meet the entry points of particular students.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing

Findings
School leaders and staff are developing systems to provide feedback to families regarding student progress toward meeting expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness. The clarity of feedback to students is developing in order to prepare students for their next level of education.

Impact
School leaders and staff have taken steps to provide families with systems to track student progress and to provide students with feedback. At this time, however, many students and families cannot speak to academic progress of students. As a result, not all students and families can speak with ownership of next steps in learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In meeting with parents, there was an inconsistency of parents knowing what is being learned by their children in school as well as the progress of their children. The school has purchased the services One Green Apple, a vendor who is presently setting up an online system for students and families to access information about student learning and progress which will be fully launched in the near future.

- In supporting students to know school expectations and college and career expectations, the school has partnered with Counseling in Schools. The program provides the school with two counselors who work with students who need support in their social and emotional development from kindergarten through grade 8 as well as with their families. Students are also encouraged to be “Bucket Fillers” and not “Bucket Dippers” which is part of the school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Through PBIS and the use of the book, “How Full is Your Bucket?” students are supported and encouraged to make good choices and inspire others to do so as well. The principal has also begun to celebrate the work of teachers around how highlighting high expectations for students reaps exceptional results. For example, one of the special education teachers in grade 1 has been able to get her students to write more than general education students in some of the higher grades through having high expectations and meeting students at their entry points. With that said, despite teachers using rubrics to assess student work, in reviewing student work products, meaningful and actionable feedback was inconsistent and drawn from rubric language that students do not understand in some cases. Several students could not speak to their next steps and goals and, therefore, do not own their learning. Therefore, the communication of high expectations for writing is inconsistent for some students.

- While teachers have engaged in many opportunities for learning brought back to them by the teacher leaders in the Learning Partners program and from other consultants, the learning has not yet translated across all classrooms with teachers planning with high expectations for students in mind and in meeting students at their entry points.