



# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Martin Van Buren High School**

**High School Q435**

**230-17 Hillside Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11427**

**Principal: Sam Sochet**

**Date of review: April 23, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Musa Ali Shama**

## The School Context

Martin Van Buren is a high school with 1,693 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 51% Black, 14% Hispanic, 3% White, and 26% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 82.1%.

## 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>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</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>Additional Findings</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>Developing</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>Celebration</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

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

School leaders have developed systems of accountability regarding professionalism, communication, and instruction and provide staff with training through faculty seminars and communicate to students and parents regarding a path to college and careers.

### Impact

Teachers promote a culture for learning that is leading to increased student achievement and feedback to student and families helps them to understand next steps towards college readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- A system has been developed to communicate the college readiness process to students starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Guidance Counselors visit classrooms to outline the college application process and follow through with individual and small group sessions. Review of printed material that students receive articulate each step of the of the college readiness process and teachers promote the expectation in their classes through creating links to student work to being prepared for success in college and careers. Workshops are provided to students and parents around the State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) application process, scholarships, college planning, and financial aid. College visits and college fairs are open to all students and promoted school wide. The school's website is an additional resource to provide parents with another venue to have access to college information.
- The principal holds monthly faculty seminars that promote the culture of high expectations for his teachers. The seminars are interdisciplinary professional learning sessions that are focused on creating coherent instruction, discussion and questioning techniques, enhancing student engagement and effective assessment practices. Instructional strategies discussed drive observation and feedback cycles to teachers to provide teachers with targeted support by school leaders and instructional coaches.
- All teachers utilize the Pupil Path online student management system to communicate to families and students. They post grades as well as anecdotal information to provide parents feedback on their child's progress. Students in student interviewed confirmed the use of the grading system to help them understand what their next steps where for improving academic performance.
- Systems are in place to promote college level coursework as all students are offered access to Advance Placement courses, College Now classes, and the College Focus program. The college credit bearing courses provide student with rigorous courses of study that help prepare students for post-secondary expectations. Various supports, such as after school and Saturday school to provide targeted tutoring and College workshops to help inform students and parents of the value of college level coursework in the application process are provided to help students achieve this.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

### Findings

School leaders and faculty are in the process of making purposeful decisions to build coherence in curricula across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students.

### Impact

Curricular decisions limit the opportunities for all students to be cognitively engaged in rigorous tasks that employ higher order thinking skills and lead to college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and faculty are in the process of developing, refining, and implementing curricula that are Common Core aligned and reflect purposeful decisions to build coherence across grades and subject areas. This school year, the Math department purchased the *Big Ideas Math* textbook that is Common Core Learning Standards aligned for algebra and geometry and is in the process of adapting lessons to incorporate material from the textbook. The Social Studies department is utilizing the New York City Department of Education Scope and Sequence for Global History and English language arts (ELA) are in the process ensuring alignment of learning standards by strategically incorporating the instructional shifts into curricula across grades.
- The process of planning and refining curricula and academic tasks through a process of analyzing student work was clearly evident in ELA. ELA leadership and teachers articulated a process of looking at low, medium, and high examples of student work of completed tasks. The ELA team identify next steps to inform the creation of scaffolds and supports to support the diversity of learners, including students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) such as the use of graphic organizers and guided notes. However, this process was in the early stages in social studies, math, and science.
- A review of curricula across content areas revealed an inconsistent approach to curriculum planning across subject areas. For example in ELA curriculum, Essential Questions were developed for each unit in addition to Common Core Learning Standards, key student learning objectives, sequence of key learning activities, and assessments. However, structure and approach to curricula development varied across content areas and the use of a common unit plan template was not evident, for example Global History provided a list of 65 Aims with unit plans that highlighted key ideas and themes. Geometry listed standards and topics.

## Additional Findings

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

Teaching strategies that effectively incorporated student-to-student discourse, student engagement, questioning that stimulated critical thinking, and reflected the school's set of beliefs on how students' learn best was inconsistent.

### Impact

Student participation in high levels of student thinking and participation were limited leading to uneven levels of student engagement.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership expressed that there has been a focus on Danielson's Framework for Teaching Domains 3b, Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques, 3c Engaging Students in Learning, 3d Using Assessment in Instruction, 1e Designing Coherent Instruction. Instructional leaders have conducted professional learning through faculty seminars focused on supporting teachers to implement strategies and tools to refine their pedagogical repertoire in these domains. However, across classrooms visited these practices were not consistently executed with fidelity leading to uneven student engagement.
- Across classrooms, student-to-student discussions that reflect high levels of student discussions were inconsistent. For example, in an ELA grade eleven class, students were working cooperatively on critical lenses writing their own interpretations, then sharing them in their group to discuss their thinking, finally sharing out to the larger class that stimulated student generated questions in which resulted in students responding to each other. In contrast, in a Living Environment class, at the start of the lesson the teacher asked students to answer the following questions; "What does the term biodiversity mean, where we are referring to the biodiversity of an ecosystem?" and "Based on your definition for biodiversity, what do we mean when we say an ecosystem is losing biodiversity?" and "How does acid rain effect biodiversity?". Students worked independently, before being called up to the board to write their answers followed by the teacher taking a survey of the students as to which answer they believed was correct, finally selecting answer without student input as to why they agreed or disagreed. During that portion of the lesson, the teacher walked around the room making students aware of the remaining time to answer questions but students engaged in discourse regarding their thoughts of biodiversity.
- Across classrooms, high levels of student thinking and participation were inconsistent. For example, in a Spanish class, students were working in groups to develop a written dialogue between two people using recently taught vocabulary and conjugated verbs, within the conversation. Students were utilizing the target language, providing each other feedback, and working collaboratively to develop their dialogue and were using a rubric to self-assess the quality of the work. However, in financial algebra class, most students were working individually on a worksheet. The teacher transitioned into the final portion of the lesson by calling a student up to complete a problem at the board. The student placed her answer on the board and the teacher proceeded to talk through the student's thinking and posed questions such as "Can this solution be on a dotted line?" yielding yes/no responses from students with the teacher explaining the correct answer to students. She then asked "Where would you see this in stocks?" with only one student offering up an example as the period came to an end.

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

School wide assessment practices are inconsistently used to inform about student progress and checks for understanding to make timely, effective instructional adjustments that meet the needs of all learners.

### Impact

The quality of assessment practices varied across grades and subject areas providing limited feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and resulting in limited adjustments to meet the needs of all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflected an effective use of ongoing checks for understanding to make adjustments to meet students' learning needs. For example, in ELA class with the Essential Question, "Can your conscience mislead you?" After a class discussion, students were asked to write a paragraph "... about [a] time they made a wrong decision, even though your intention was good". Teachers walked around the room speaking to students regarding their progress, as the class ended, they used an exit slip that had the two questions "1) Did I enjoy the activities in today's lesson? Why or why not? Explain. 2) What could have been done differently so that I could be even more engaged in my learning?" Although there was an attempt to have students' assess the learning strategies, a review of student responses did not reflect an assessment of the learning target, "How do themes gives us a more in-depth understanding of a text?" In a Geometry class, students were working in groups of three on a worksheet. As the students worked, the teacher moved around the room responding to students when they asked for help. The period ended without a final summary of the lesson, or any evidence of the teacher understanding what questions students were struggling with or got wrong, that would allow her to adjust the next day's lesson to meet student needs.
- Across the school in both hallways and classrooms, there were displays of student work some with tasks posted. The level of teacher feedback attached to student work varied from providing actionable feedback and next steps aligned to a rubric for students to improve their work, as well as student work highlighted with statements of "Good Job", "Great", or a rubric with scores attached. In a student meeting, students stated that teacher feedback varied as it depended on the teacher. They stated that some teachers used rubrics on all their assignments, gave them feedback on how to improve their work, and provided guidance using a rubric for them self-assess their progress in achieving high grades.
- In ELA, teachers have led students in the creation of "student friendly" rubrics for level one students' so that they can self-assess their progress in writing tasks. The ELA department is working on refining rubrics aligned to the school's curricula, based on look at low, medium, and high examples of student work to provide teachers with meaningful feedback that allow them to provide targeted supports to students in order to increase student achievement. However, at the time of the review, this practice was not evident in this department.

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

Professional collaborations across disciplines and the school enable teachers and faculty to analyze data, reflect on student work, improve instruction, adjust student programming to increase student achievement.

**Impact**

Teachers engage in structured collaborative inquiry and analysis of student data thus leading to strengthened instructional practice and refined curricula.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A majority of teachers are involved in professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. For example in an ELA team teacher meeting, teachers had gone through series of looking at student work cycles to refine curricula. They were in the process of identifying key skills students needed across grades to create a vertical alignment of skills that would lead to college and career readiness. Teachers articulated that meeting as a team allowed them to better understand what was happening in other grades, and allowed them to share strategies that improved their teaching repertoire. The team protocols in place for looking at student work and tracking their next steps. In the Science department teams have worked on aligning Common Core Learning Standards to their curricula that has led to the infusion of more writing into science lessons.
- Teachers articulated that they analyze student work, interim assessment results, course passing rates, and related student achievement data to improve their instructional practices. Science teachers identified that in Jan 2015 Living Environment Regents Exam students' weaknesses in answer short response questions, and developed strategies to support students in the Living Environment course where embedded throughout the school year.
- In math, teachers focused on the June 2014 Algebra Regents exam conducted item analysis and worked collaboratively to identify resources to support the alignment of curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards. In Social Studies, teachers were working with a Network Coach on vocabulary and writing strategies, and had collaboratively developed interim assessments to identify gaps in student learning and to inform curriculum refinements.