



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

**The Van Nest Academy for
Environmental Health Sciences and Technology**

Elementary-Middle School X498

**1640 Bronxdale Avenue
Bronx
NY 10462**

Principal: Carol Ann Gilligan

**Date of review: January 30, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Cheryl McClendon**

The School Context

The Van Nest Academy for Environmental Health Sciences and Technology is an elementary-middle school with 579 students from grade kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 13% Black, 67% Hispanic, 13% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 95.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	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	Celebration	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	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	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Standards and emphasize the instructional shifts. Analysis of student work and data inform curricular planning and modifications.

Impact

The school's emphasis on the instructional shifts and on-going analysis of curricular, student work and data has established coherence across grades and subject areas so that all students have access to the curriculum and engage in high-level cognitive tasks that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school selected Ready Gen and Envision Math in grades K through 5 and Codex and Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3) in grades 6 through 8. These programs were selected for their alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards, as articulated by the principal. For social studies instruction, teachers use Harcourt Social Studies and the New York City Social Studies Scope and Sequence. The Full Option Science System curriculum (FOSS) is used for science in the elementary grades. Student with disabilities and struggling students are targeted in the Response to Intervention (RTI) program. Teachers implement Foundations Reading program, iReady math, and English language arts diagnostic programs.
- The school purposefully and strategically integrates the Common Core instructional shifts into the instructional program through the following structures and strategies: classroom libraries that reflect a balance of informational and literary texts; unit plans highlighting explicit teaching of academic vocabulary; a focus on students providing text-based evidence across subjects; lesson plans that reflect the use of concrete manipulatives from math toolkits, and the integration of writing in math to promote deeper conceptual understandings in math. Teachers plan performance tasks that have real-world applications, such as budgeting, cooking, and creating scale models. Vertical teacher teams ensure coherence across grades. Unit plans and lesson plans contain the learning target, Common Core standards, the mini-lesson, higher-order questions, guided practice and strategies for differentiation and key vocabulary.
- The faculty uses the Rubicon Atlas web-based curriculum management tool to map, analyze, and modify school wide curricula. The principal shared that after the implementation of each unit teachers are expected to review the standards that were covered and the assessments that were administered. Any standards-based concepts that were not covered as planned are integrated into the next unit.
- Teacher teams analyze the curriculum and assess student work and data to refine planning and make curricular modifications. For example, after identifying the spiraled standards, the English language arts teacher team condensed the seven units of the Codex curriculum to four units, increasing coherence and providing more time for students to achieve mastery in each standard. Analysis of student work in math identified deficits in solving word problems, rational numbers and equations and expressions. In response, teachers developed math workstations with intervention tasks.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices reflect the school's beliefs about how students learn best, as informed by the Danielson Framework for teaching and instructional shifts. While student work and discussions reflected high-level thinking and participation across classrooms, this level of engagement was not observed in some classes visited.

Impact

Many classrooms exhibit practices that elicit high-level thinking and participation from students, however some do not.

Supporting Evidence

- In alignment with the school's beliefs that students learn best through discussion with peers, and the use of concrete and representational models, students in a sixth grade Integrated Co-Teaching class were observed engaging in student-to-student discussion as they worked on dividing fractions using bar models. One teacher worked with a group to provide guided instruction, while the other teacher circulated amongst independent groups to provide support. Each group wrote and illustrated their solutions on a chart, which they posted on the wall. Student groups engaged in a gallery walk to analyze and discuss their peer's solutions and provide feedback. This effective use of scaffolds and guided instruction was not observed in some classrooms visited. For example in one kindergarten classroom as students sat at tables looking in their math books, the teacher instructed them to think of a number that is more than two but less than six. Although many students were observed to be struggling with the task, as they recorded inaccurate answers in their workbooks, the teacher did not circulate to check for understanding. As noted by the principal during the debriefing, the task needed to be "broken down" or appropriately scaffolded to engage student understanding.
- Teachers implement units of study in writing that culminate in publishing celebrations. During the visit, students in a second grade class read their published narrative essays aloud to an audience of peers, family members, and staff. Students were given a choice of the ways in which they shared their writing. Among those choices were videotaped reading, whole-class share, small-group share, and one-to-one share with a family member or friend. Within the group-share forums designated students were given responsibilities such as group leader. Audience members provided written feedback and student authors collected and read all feedback to support them in reflecting on their work. All student authors were required to write written reflections as a subsequent homework assignment.
- In a fifth grade classroom students engaged in close reading and discussion of the prologue and chapter one of the Ready Gen anchor text, "Heart and Soul". The teacher chunked the text, providing key questions to guide students' focus during each read and the subsequent group discussion. As students engaged in group discussion, they shared the inferences they drew from the selected text and challenged each other to provide textual evidence by asking, "Where did you see that?" and "Why do you think that?" Following the discussions, a reporter from each group shared key points from the group discussion with the entire class.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers' use of assessments, rubrics, and standardized grading policies are aligned with the curricula and facilitate actionable feedback to students and teachers. Common assessments are used to adjust curricula and instruction.

Impact

Common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement and inform curricular and instructional modifications.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers administer Teachers College Reading and Writing Project running records four times per year. Teachers and school leaders use Assessment Pro online database to manage and track the data across benchmarks. Teachers discuss independent reading levels with students and communicate each student's reading progress to his/her family at each benchmark period.
- Across grades and classrooms teachers introduce rubrics to students at the beginning of each unit of study. Teacher teams have developed a "universal" rubric, which entails the "6+1 Writing Traits", a Common Core Learning Standards checklist, the content area-related rubric, task description, and task assessment checklist. During the teacher team meeting, teachers stated that the development and use of the universal rubric has contributed to coherence in assessment across classes and grades because all teachers across the grades are using the same structures to assess and evaluate student work.
- The school wide grading policy was purposefully revised in August 2014 to ensure vertical alignment and coherence in grading across all grades and subjects.
- Across classrooms, a color-coded system assessment system is used to monitor student proficiency in Common Core aligned curricular tasks. Students indicate their self-assessment by placing the color indicating their level of understanding of the task. In a third grade class, a teacher asked a student why he had the color yellow displayed on his desk. His response was, "Because I understand it but I can't teach it to someone else yet." In addition, students use other self-assessment structures such as the reader's response checklist and the "I can..." student reflection checklist, which contains a list of the Common Core standards in the form of "I can" statements to guide student reflection of his or her level of proficiency in each standard.
- The school implements an extensive RTI program that is informed by baseline and progress-monitoring data from iReady Reading and Math Diagnostic Surveys and Teachers College Reading and Writing running records. Students who are identified in need of support in math and reading are provided with iReady intervention modules and guided reading instruction.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders' well-communicated high expectations for the level and quality of teacher professionalism, instruction, communication, and other criteria related to the Danielson framework for Teaching are matched by effective teacher training opportunities and a system of accountability. School leaders and teachers engage in meaningful partnerships with families to support students' progress towards college and career readiness.

Impact

Faculty members are mutually accountable to each other as teachers are well supported in meeting school leaders' high expectations. Families feel well informed and supported in helping their children progress because of effective parent- staff partnerships.

Supporting Evidence

- In August, school leaders host a summer retreat wherein staff engages in planning and setting the stage for the coming year. There is a comprehensive professional learning calendar that was informed by teacher survey, end-of-year priority-setting meetings, observation data, summative data, and feedback from coaches and mentors.
- Professional learning teams are required to share their agendas with the administration, which are then posted on the professional learning team bulletin board in the main lobby. This informs all faculty members of the topics covered during these meetings and facilitates accountability and professional sharing. In addition the work of the curriculum mapping team is continually updated in the Rubicon Atlas curriculum-mapping portal and all faculty members are required to log in regularly to use the tool for lesson planning and provide feedback. As contributing members of the professional learning teams and curriculum mapping team, school leaders are also held accountable through these structures.
- Each grade hosts a "Meet the Teacher Night" in September. In addition to a curriculum overview, discussion of grading policy, behavioral expectations, and homework expectations, each grade highlights other grade-wide expectations. For example kindergarten teachers encourage monthly parent engagement and volunteerism and invite parents to come in to read aloud to students. Through the well-maintained Van Nest Academy website, families and faculty can access daily announcements, guidance department information, intra-mural events schedule, character education highlights, and links for Khan Academy, Dial-a-teacher, Engage NY, Office of Adult Continuing Education, Inside Schools and more. In addition there is an e-mail link for each teacher contained on the website. Each marking period, the school hosts formal induction ceremonies for The Van Nest Academy (VNA) Honor Society. Students and families are invited to the evening ceremony.

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

The majority of teachers engage in structured professional collaborations that are focused on the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards’ instructional shifts and the attainment of school wide goals. Established distributed leadership structures support the development of teacher leadership.

Impact

Teacher teams support effective implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and improved teacher capacity. Established distributed leadership structures engage teachers in key decision-making that affect student learning school-wide.

Supporting Evidence

- School wide goal #3 embodies the mission and function of the school’s teacher teams. This goal asserts the school’s commitment to 100% participation of teaching staff in collaborative inquiry-based work by June 2015. During the visit a teacher team was observed beginning the team meeting by reviewing the group’s norms and citing the minutes from the last meeting. The note taker recorded notes as teachers focused on further developing strategies for common assessment and feedback in the area of writing. Teachers discussed how the recent extension of the grade 6 - 8, “6+1 Writing Trait” rubric to the fifth grade is facilitating greater coherence and preparing fifth grade students for middle school expectations. Reflecting on the success of this modification, teachers considered the value in extending other structures and scaffolds across the grades. A teacher shared her success with using the Restate, Answer, Cite, Explain (RACE) model to scaffold her student’s response-writing skills. Teachers agreed that the simplicity of the model makes it an effective tool for elementary and middle school students as well as students with disabilities and English language learners.
- Kindergarten to five horizontal grade teams meet weekly to look at student work and data and make necessary modifications to curricular materials. Grade six to eight vertical subject area teams also meet weekly to analyze student work and data, modify materials, and create vertical structures to promote coherence. In an effort to fulfill school wide goal # 2 which focuses on the students in grades 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 making 3% progress in proficiency on the English language arts exam, there is an articulated plan for teachers to engage in on-going inquiry, examination of student work and the planning and revision of Common Core-aligned curricula. This focus has supported significant progress in reading and comprehension throughout the focal grades as measured by running record data and performance-based assessment data.
- Various other teacher teams that exist at the school are the professional learning team, Gifted and Talented Testing team, the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) team and the VNA Honor Society team. The professional learning team is a vertical team comprised of teachers and coaches from all grades and administrative members. The focus of this team is to develop responsive, needs-based professional learning opportunities based upon analysis of multiple data sources.