



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**J.H.S. 217 Robert A. Van Wyck**

**Middle School Q217**

**85-05 144 Street  
Queens  
NY 11435**

**Principal: Patrick Burns**

**Date of review: March 10, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Deborah Burnett-Worthy**

## The School Context

J.H.S 217 Robert A. Van Wyck is a middle school with 1,586 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 37% Asian, 13% Black, 41% Hispanic, and 6% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 15% students with disabilities. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 93.4%.

## 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>Additional Findings</b> | <b>Well Developed</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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products | <b>Focus</b>               | <b>Well Developed</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>Celebration</b>         | <b>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</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>Well Developed</b> |

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Assessment practices aligned to the curricula across all grades and content areas incorporate extensive use of ongoing real time assessments including rubrics, varied checks for understanding and student self-assessment. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students learning needs.

### Impact

Teachers and students are provided with actionable feedback regarding student achievement. Students learning needs are met and they are aware of their next learning steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- There was documented evidence across grade and subject areas showing multiple instances of real-time assessments attached to a single assignment. For example, after a turn and talk to discuss a plan of action, a grade 7 student received a peer-assessment on an argumentative essay outline. The assessment consisted of a 12-point checklist and instructions to, "Check if your classmate has all of the elements of their 'quote sandwich', introduction and conclusion. Be specific. Offer suggestions." The essay was then written and a "glow" and "grow" attached from the teacher: "Strong evidence to support your claims, you have very strong reasons as well! Please proof read for grammar and spelling mistakes and remember to include tier 2 and 3 vocabulary in your work." Self-assessment was also part of the documented feedback. A five-point rubric completed by the student and the teacher and a self-reflection slip were also attached. "The student reflected, I met my goal because I got a higher grade than before, next time I will proofread my work and add tier 2 and 3 vocabulary."
- Various student proficiency checks were observed including ongoing formative assessments, exit tickets, daily classroom assessments and the maintenance and monitoring of *Skedula*, an on line grade monitoring software. Additionally, benchmark assessments are utilized and result in detailed analysis by each teacher during data days. For example, the data review of four focus groups of students revealed the following increases towards mastery as documented by the comparison of the English Language Arts benchmark assessments given marking period one and marking period number two. Group one increased from 47.72% to 54.18% on or above grade level, group two increased from 48.19 to 60.66 % on or above grade level, and group three progressed from 54.97% to 57.75% on or above grade level. Students with disabilities also progressed towards mastery from 37.19% on or above grade level score to 41.39% increase.
- When ongoing weekly checks for understanding revealed that the English Language Learners were the only focus group that lost ground towards mastery, 33.61% to 32.95% in English Language Arts. Lesson plan collection, targeted observations and checks for understanding by standard helped teachers to make effective adjustments in the curricula map so the students learning needs were met. The benchmark assessment following the adjustments showed an increase in the English Language Learner's demonstration of mastery from 32.95% to 34.87% on or above grade level.

## Area of Focus

|                           |                     |                |                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.2 Pedagogy</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and discussions at the team and school levels. Rigorous work and discussions allow students to demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation.

### Impact

Ownership in meaningful work products and discussions aligned to the instructional shifts is in the process of being reflected by all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- In several classes students were given the opportunity to think, reason and discuss with minor input from the teacher. A grade 7 math class was asked to each list 5 states in the USA. Then consider the following: “Which letter appears the most?”, “Which letter appears the least?” and “Do you think the data collected from these states will be representative of all 50 states? Why or Why not?” When the teacher asked students to share their thinking on the data collection, students were permitted to turn and talk and then share out their thoughts. A student commented, “Five states would not represent 50 states because, as you see, everybody used different states. For accuracy we would need a larger sample.” Students also predicted the letter “e” as the most frequent appearing because it is a vowel.
- The teacher in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class reminded the students that they all would be doing an activity that is aligned with the word of the week which the Principal announced was “describe”. Students were placed homogenously according to their MP2 Teen biz Lexile levels and given materials that corresponded with their group level. To support students who were tasked with analyzing a 1931 map of Asia, there were two different versions of the exact same article “Japan invades Manchuria-1931.”
- A 7th grade English Language Arts class included four “I Can” statements. I can analyze how specific excerpts of Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass convey Douglass’s position on slavery. I can reread a complex text to better understand it. I can determine an author’s point of view or purpose in informational text. I can analyze how the author distinguishes his/her position from others. Although students were at different levels working with a range of tiered materials, each student owned the “I Can” statements and their responsibility to respond to the teachers inquiries on how successful they were with achieving the learning target.
- Eight students in a grade 6 science class were conducting a dissection of a frog. Seventeen additional students in the same class were on laptops. One group shared out their feelings on the moral correctness of using animals for dissecting. Two students said they disagreed with dissecting because they were uncomfortable with hurting animals. Several other students shared that they agree that it is OK to use animals because, “this is a way to learn about the human body and new things in science.” However, although there were opinions and conflicting points of view on the topic, students did not get the opportunity to support their views with cited text and researched resources.

## Additional Findings

|                           |                       |                |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>1.1 Curriculum</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
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### Findings

Rigorous and higher order thinking skills are emphasized in curricula across grades and subjects for all learners. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

All students are given opportunities for college and career readiness by the use of curricula that has access for various learners and tasks that are cognitively engaging.

### Supporting Evidence

- Living Environment content and the 1200 minutes of labs and culminating Regents exams are strategically incorporated into the 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum to give students the opportunity to earn high school credits and promote college and career readiness. All learners including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities are required to complete the rigorous learning activities that require higher-order thinking skills.
- Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using the student work and data of every student. Each teacher analyses and presents the results of the targeted standards and skills. For example, after a score of 42.30% across all focus standards on the third marking period, one special education teacher refined her curriculum to "... to explicitly teach vocabulary that students will see on nonfictional documents. I also need to reinforce close reading strategies." Another teacher came to the conclusion that the average score of 54% on her students marking period 3 pretest revealed that they were struggling with identifying key steps in a text's description of a process related to history, for example, how a bill becomes a law. In order to assist the students with this struggle she planned for the curriculum to include instruction on the importance of how the events occur within a timeline or document. She also planned her lessons to include images, written documents and leveled texts. High achieving learners that completed the assignment before the given deadline were given the opportunity to provide further research on one of the artifacts included in the timeline.
- The module of the curriculum that included instruction on writing an argumentative essay was planned and refined for access for various learners. Fredrick Douglass Speech "What to the American Slave is Your Fourth of July", was planned with two different versions of the essay guidelines for the same topic so the task was cognitively engaging to strong and struggling students. Stronger learners were guided to "Create a hook to grab the reader: make statement about slavery in America. Provide a little background information on the institution of slavery in America." Other learners were also provided with sentence stems to assist with the introduction of evidence for the same task. Three sentence stems for introducing evidence were; According to..., The book states..., The character said.... Three sentence stems for explaining why the evidence is important: This evidence provides ..., This evidence proves..., This evidence suggests ....

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| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>3.4 High Expectations</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and offer supportive training. School leaders and staff also communicate expectations of family support to advance students' college and career readiness.

### Impact

These communications result in a culture of mutual accountability among staff members and families who support student progress towards college and career readiness.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff beginning with the instructional focus statement issued and reviewed in September. Teachers are alerted to the expectation that they will design coherent instruction, driven by the Common Core Learning Standards with learning objectives that are in alignment and driven by specific real time student data. There are also documented communications that include the expectancy that instruction will include higher order thinking questions required to compel authentic student-to-student questioning and discussion. Frequent assessing of student understanding throughout the lesson across all classrooms, demonstrated flexibility in flexible student groups and differentiation through use of scaffolds or extensions that develop academic skills and support college and career readiness. Training to support these expectations occur frequently throughout the year in the form of scheduled workshops, meetings and professional collaborations that are documented on an instructional support calendar that lists daily training events. These conferences support the success of these accomplishments and result in a school-wide culture that every staff member is mutually accountable for.
- As documented in the staff handbook and staff memos, school leaders communicated the expectation of rigor through distribution of a quote by author and educator Barbara Blackburn, "Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels." The expectation of rigor and college and career readiness is further supported by documented references to Bloom's Taxonomy when creating questions and student tasks. Teachers acknowledged this quote and their understanding of their mutual accountability.
- School leaders and staff members communicate high expectations to parents and families by holding and including them in monthly parent learning walks. These events are designed to get parents into the classroom and encourage parent partnerships which provide support for student progress towards college and career readiness goals. Parents are also encouraged to meet their child's teacher team, which is made up of teachers from all content areas for a student specific analysis of the student's progress and needed reinforcement to move each student closer to expectations of college and career readiness. Ninety percent of the parents interviewed participated in one or both of these events and all reported an increase in their child's grades and attitudes towards being challenged once they supported the students using the strategies teachers taught them.

|                           |   |                |                       |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Quality Indicator:</b> | <b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b> | <b>Rating:</b> | <b>Well Developed</b> |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|

### Findings

Teams of teachers systematically analyze major elements of their instructional practice and share strategies to improve staff and student achievement. Distributive leadership structures empower teachers to collaborate regularly with all school leaders.

### Impact

Through extensive teamwork and shared leadership structures, teachers and other staff have multiple opportunities to provide critical input in high-level decisions that improve teaching and learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Detailed documentation of student data across grade and content areas, broken down by subgroup, show the impact of teaching practice changes made to improve student performance. For example, the math team concluded that grade 6 students needed to focus on solving equations. The team decided that there would be an emphasis on equations and expressions. The team decided to reteach and revisit skill sets required for mastery of equations. *Mastery Connect*, a data collection program, divulged the following: schoolwide the grade 6 students improved from 45.47% mastery in marking period number one to 64.87% mastery in marking period number two. A special focus group, a group of students with disabilities and a group of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) respectively made the following gains towards mastery: from 29.10% to 46.06%, from 32.12% to 54.02% and from 27.68 % to 42.06% mastery. The math inquiry team also concluded that grade 7 should focus on statistics and probability and grade 8 needed to focus on graphing the solution to linear inequalities. The adjustments made in teacher practice resulted in similar gains toward mastery for these grades.
- Three grade teams and five content area teams of inquiry at this school meet multiple times a month to review student data and share strategies which inform adjustments to teaching practices that move student performance. When student struggles regarding insight and point of view were revealed, the English inquiry team changed the curriculum to include the question “How would this perception change?” in the unit of study on the historical children’s novel “Dragons Wings”. It was also decided that flexible grouping should be included as a method to drive the tasks.
- Teachers are empowered to make instructional decisions that affect student learning schoolwide because of the embedded inquiry structure where the principal visits an inquiry team to “ask the right questions” not direct. Interviewed team members disclosed that their findings as individuals and as teams are the driving force for many decisions that influence student learning across the school. The decision to have students annotate text manually across grade and content areas was made by the ELA inquiry team when their collaboration revealed that students were struggling due to an unrealistic computer experience and unavailability of technology at home for some students. There is evidence that this action plan has moved student performance closer to mastery. The teacher members of the science inquiry team also made a decision to focus on vocabulary words of the week including, “determine”, “compare” and “describe” to support grade 8 students taking the Living Environment Regents exam.