



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Martin Van Buren High School

High School Q435

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

Principal: Sam Sochet

**Date of review: April 14, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

The School Context

Martin Van Buren High School is a high school with 1,438 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 28% Asian, 49% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 12% students with disabilities. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 84.4%.

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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	Developing
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	Celebration	Proficient
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:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and families and implement systems to help them work with students to meet the expectations. School leaders hold all staff accountable for meeting high expectations for teaching and learning.

Impact

Effective and consistent communication of and support for high expectations for all staff and students along with collaborations with families contribute to a system of accountability for staff and student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of school documents and conversations with staff members indicates that school leaders consistently articulate high expectations for all members of the school community through discussions at faculty conferences and grade and department meetings. Bulletins, newsletters, and memos specify expectations related to instruction and professional development. During teacher team meetings, teachers stated that the principal has communicated the expectation of a school-wide focus on instructional practices that result in all students being able to develop evidence-based claims in writing across all disciplines. In addition, all teachers are expected to implement differentiated instruction, effective questioning and discussion practices, and data-driven instruction for all students. School leaders hold teachers accountable for meeting expectations through observations of their practice and via written and verbal reminders for them to focus on the targeted elements of instruction.
- In collaboration with professional learning partners from Teachers College and Johns Hopkins University, school leaders provide all staff with weekly professional development support related to topics such as using data to drive instruction, improving questioning and discussion, differentiating tasks, scaffolding instruction, and using assessment in instruction. In addition, school leaders encourage all teachers to plan lessons using a uniform lesson plan template that is aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to remind teachers of essential components that they are expected to incorporate into their plans. Further, teachers receive training on how to utilize Writing is Thinking with Strategic Inquiry (WITSi) strategies to assess comprehension and move students towards success on evidenced-based writing tasks. One teacher reported that teachers receive professional learning support through peer-to-peer intervisitations, including visits to a model teacher's classroom, and directly from school leaders who facilitate faculty seminars.
- During the meeting with families, parents reported that staff members confer with them about their children's progress towards graduation requirements, career options, college admissions and application steps, and College Now options open to their children. Transcripts, progress reports, telephone calls, emails, texts, and the PupilPath online data system keep all families informed about their children's progress. Events such as a college fair, financial aid presentations, a "College March," college workshops, trips to colleges, and college advisement for both parents and students provide families with an understanding of college and career readiness expectations for their children and connect families to resources for helping their children meet all requirements.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

While there are student-to-student discussions in some classrooms, lessons do not typically facilitate discussions with all students demonstrating high levels of thinking and participation. Teaching practices do not consistently allow for engagement of all students in rigorous tasks.

Impact

There are missed opportunities to deepen learning by all students via challenging tasks and discussions that consistently evoke higher-order thinking across disciplines and result in high quality student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Some lessons challenge students to use academic vocabulary and cite evidence from texts to justify their rationales for responses to critical thinking tasks. In an English class, the teacher presented a lesson that required students to answer questions by citing evidence from “How Madoff Did It,” an article about a Ponzi scheme. The teacher engaged students in reflecting on target vocabulary words in the article and led them in a review of the central idea of a passage. Then students were assigned to work in groups to create a chart with the main idea and supporting evidence that they would use for a group presentation to the class. By contrast, students in a mixed grade English class spent most of the observed period working on the Do Now that was linked to homework that some had not done.
- Lessons in some classrooms offered students multiple points of entry to differentiated tasks. A math teacher facilitated small group work that required students to use academic vocabulary to report on responses to a task that involved creating and solving quadratic equations. With the use of a calculator, each group explored different strategies for getting the correct response to the assigned problem in their workbook. Individual students were called upon to share problem-solving steps with the entire class. In some of the other classrooms visited, including a mixed grade math class where most students sat watching and copying notes and diagrams from the board as the teacher presented information about types of angles, all students worked on the same task with no variations for their diverse levels of proficiency.
- In a few of the classrooms visited, teachers provided prompts to initiate discussions about tasks completed or texts read, and students took turns responding. In a mixed grade earth science class, the teacher engaged small groups of students in creating posters about aspects of the universe and how it is formed. Students used laptops to research the topic and add information to a poster that the group was creating via shared writing. They questioned each other about findings and collaborated on what should be written on the group chart. The high level of peer-to-peer discussion that emerged in this class was not typically evident across classrooms. For example, students in a social studies class read an excerpt from a handout about the Great Depression and engaged in copying details from the handout in response to a few low-level questions. Most worked in silence and a few who were off-task received little attention from the teacher.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All teachers work collaboratively to further develop curricula across content areas in alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and relevant content standards. Using student work and data, teachers refine curricula and tasks for diverse learners across all grades and content areas.

Impact

All students have access to curricula and tasks designed to cognitively engage them in learning across grades levels and content areas. Curricula, aligned to relevant content standards and instructional shifts, contribute to college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and content areas, teacher-developed curriculum maps, pacing calendars, and lesson plans illustrate tasks aligned to applicable Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. Using content from *EngageNY*, curriculum teachers meet weekly to create units of instruction with tasks that emphasize academic language, close reading, and citing evidence from texts. An “Academic Vocabulary Word of the Week” initiative leads to tasks linked to target words. Unit plans show that words such as categorize, classify, compare, contrast, and cause and effect were target words across content areas and grades. New York City Scope and Sequence, along with *New Visions* curriculum, guides instruction in social studies and provides content for literacy-based projects and writing tasks. Students also have access to demanding tasks linked to advanced placement courses in English, calculus, World History, US History, Biology, studio art and Spanish.
- School curricula include content and tasks for a pre-medicine and pre-nursing program that offer courses in nursing, physical therapy, and emergency medical technician services. There is an engineering-robotics design program with courses in robotics and computer programming, web design, and computer animation. There are also curricula for a pre-law and leadership program with courses in conflicts in law, civil, criminal, and constitutional law that expose students to careers in criminology, forensics, law, and toxicology. In addition, curricula for a credit-bearing Career Development and Occupational Studies course provide some students with access to career and occupation readiness tasks. Curricula offerings for an Extended Learning Time program provide additional content and tasks designed to accelerate course completion, credit accumulation, and college readiness through enrichment and intervention activities that include advanced placement work and preparation for Regents assessments.
- School leaders and teachers stated that teams of teachers meet weekly to examine student work in order to constantly refine instruction and curricula. Through item analysis of data from Scantron, Datacatation, interim assessments, and Regents exams, teachers identify student strengths and gaps in learning and collaborate to create instructional strategies and adjustments in lessons based on their findings. Team meeting notes include annotations that show revisions of units along with planned modifications of lessons to meet the needs of students at varied proficiency levels. For example, teachers now use *Rosetta Stone*, *System 44* and *myOn* to build language acquisition and improve reading and writing skills for English Language Learners (ELLs). Teachers of English, science, and social studies incorporate regular use of WITsi strategies, graphic organizers, and guided writing templates to target skill deficits found via examination of data for all students.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Assessment tools reflect some alignment to curricula while teacher use of checks for understanding during instruction is inconsistent across classrooms.

Impact

Although teachers provide feedback on student performance, feedback is not typically actionable, and assessment practices do not consistently result in adjustments that meet student needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers created and administered baseline and mid-year assessments in literacy to assess mastery of targeted standards. Teachers also administered interim assessments aligned to the school-wide academic vocabulary initiative. Further, in January 2016, teachers administered Regents exams to most grade 11 students. In addition, some teachers are using informal WITSi-aligned assessments, including sentence expansion performance tasks, to build student capacity to create text-based claims and expand on ideas as they cite evidence to support points of view. Teachers continue to work on full alignment of all assessments to curricula to further determine areas of proficiency as well as gaps in student learning across grades and disciplines.
- Teachers use a variety of rubrics, including task-specific rubrics, to assess students' proficiency and content knowledge related to specific performance tasks across grades and disciplines. For example, English and social studies teachers use modified Regents-aligned rubrics to assess writing and teachers of ELLs use rubrics from New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) and *EngageNY* to assess student progress towards mastery of targeted skills. Samples of student work show some teachers providing feedback aligned to the applicable rubric with next steps for students to make revisions to their work. However, some feedback seen on student work on bulletin boards and in student folders consisted of the teacher only circling portions of the rubric with no additional feedback to explicitly identify actionable next steps for the student to improve the work.
- During the meeting with students, some students stated that they use rubrics to peer- and self-assess regularly. Also, lesson plans, anecdotal records from some teachers, and team meeting notes illustrate teacher use of data to create and revise instructional groupings and set skills-based learning goals for students with specific attention to the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs. Some teachers were also observed using exit slips and questioning during instruction to check for understanding or conferring with students individually in small groups and making notes. In one classroom, the teacher re-stated concepts and questions repeatedly, conferred with students as they worked in groups, and used a graphic organizer to summarize lesson concepts for the entire class. Similar checks for understanding and immediate follow up on findings from checks for understanding during instruction were not noted in several of the classrooms visited.

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

Teacher teams meet regularly to analyze assessment data and student work for students whom they share. Distributed leadership structures are evident across the school.

Impact

The inclusion of all staff in a variety of teams empowers teachers to work collaboratively towards improvement in teacher practice and student achievement. Distributed leadership practices result in staff members having a voice in high-level decisions.

Supporting Evidence

- Through scheduled common planning periods, all teachers are involved in interdisciplinary inquiry work that involves revising and aligning curriculum maps to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards by examining student work and data. Based on a writing assessment that pointed to student weakness in using “so” in their writing, members of one team infuse the “But, Because, So” WITsi strategy into their instruction. Team documents show that similar analysis of teacher practice and student work products is taking place across the school through inquiry work by other teams such as the English as a New Language (ENL) WITsi inquiry team, grade 11 Regents inquiry team, and an ELA Regents inquiry team. The principal noted that team activities continue to contribute to improvement in student achievement as evidenced by a 74.64% credit accumulation rate for grade 9 students, which is “the highest 9th grade accumulation rate in 4 years.”
- During the inquiry team meeting observed, participants examined samples of student work to evaluate the impact of sentence expansion, a WITsi strategy that they had taught. Using a sentence expansion tracker, the team developed a tally sheet and used it to identify strengths and weaknesses in the student work samples. They debated areas that did not seem to align with criteria on the tracker and normed their evaluation of the students’ levels of mastery. They identified trends in work by other students across their classrooms and brainstormed ways in which to address the common learning needs and gaps noted. Next steps included re-teaching with more modeling and use of a revised guided writing template to show students how to move from a “kernel” to an expanded sentence by adding details that answer questions that start with who, what, why, and when.
- With staff serving in positions such as team leaders, program specialists, scholars’ advisor, deans, model teacher, data coordinator, and counselors, including a designated college advisement counselor and an ENL guidance counselor, there are varied opportunities for staff participation in shared leadership across the school. In these roles, teacher leaders regularly collaborate with school leaders to develop and implement academic priorities and help acquire instructional resources for all grades and content areas. They also work directly with other teachers in developing professional development plans, including setting up schedules for intervisitations and facilitating specialized training for staff. For example, the model teacher hosts visits by teachers who come to her classroom to view a strategy or lesson, while another teacher leader who is part of the Department of Education’s “Emerging Teacher Leader” program, initiated a grade 9 Global History inquiry group that focuses on academic vocabulary linked to past Regents exam items.