Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Martin Van Buren High School

High school 26Q435

230-17 Hillside Avenue
Queens
NY 11427

Principal: Sam Sochet

Dates of Review:
May 7, 2018 - May 8, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Carlos Perez
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Martin Van Buren High School serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

Through the school's small learning communities (SLCs), teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher practice based on reviews of student work products, and data for mutually shared students. There are structures for teachers to actively take part in leadership roles throughout the school.

Impact

There is shared improvement in teacher practice and mastery of goals for specific groups of students. Teacher voice plays an integral part of key decision making that affects student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Through the school's SLCs where teachers’ systematic review of practices occurs, is resulting in the collective implementation of annotation strategies and student self-assessment rubrics, which are taped to every desk throughout the entire school, are implemented in several classrooms. During a meeting, teachers noted how they are seeing fewer errors in targeted student work products which they attribute to the use of the student self-reflection rubric. Several teachers shared how the implementation of annotation strategies helps students analyze and process word problems and questions. English Language Arts (ELA) instructional adjustments such as the increased use of annotation strategies and the student self-assessment rubric yielded a mastery of goals for those specifically targeted students. Students surpassed the targeted goal of 70 percent for meeting the central idea development by increasing from 58 percent at the start of the year to 74 percent after the third marking period.

- Across the school, model teachers are integral to the improvement in the school's organization and serve as teacher leaders. They support colleagues and are liaisons between school leaders and teachers. Model teachers host intervisitations and work with school leaders in order to create and implement professional development opportunities that are specific to teacher needs. Teachers also act as leaders during inquiry meetings as they continuously rotate roles, such as meeting facilitator, time keeper and note taker. Teachers and school leaders both shared how teachers have a strong voice in the school, which has created according to both, "large amounts of teacher ownership and buy in." Teachers and school leaders shared that this year they have seen the highest number of teachers who have opened up their classrooms for intervisitation for their colleagues, which was a system implemented and developed by the teachers in the school. Additionally, as a result of teacher leadership instructional decision making, the implementation of the Main Idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Lead out (MEAL) paragraph structure is present and full utilized throughout many classrooms, which has demonstrated increases in the quality of ELA writing.

- A review of teacher team meeting agendas revealed how the science department focuses on specific key skills that particular students need most notably required lab questions and skills. Teachers focused on students who have taken the Living Environment and Earth Science Regents exams more than once and have not been successful. Science teachers were able to disaggregate specific student-level data that showed which required lab questions gave specific students the most difficulty, concentrating on key vocabulary terms and claims versus evidence. Then, teachers chose groups of students and worked on those precise areas throughout the school year, assessing using mock Regents exams and reviewing other assessment data. This work yielded mastery of these goals for these students in making a five percent gain mock Regents across the year, a 20 percent increase in the passing rate from 19 percent in January 2017 to 39 percent in 2018 on the Living Environment Regents exam and a six percent increase on the Earth Science Regents exam, going from 30 percent in January 2017 to 36 percent in January 2018.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: Developing |

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices have yet to become aligned to the curricula and the school’s belief that students learn best when involved in discussion as reflected in student work products.

Impact

Student work products reflect uneven levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Engaging students in challenging tasks and evidence of high levels of student discussions was seen in some classes visited. For example, during a ninth-grade ELA class, students were involved in a Socratic seminar that looked to have students respond to questions that relate to love, a broad theme found in *Romeo and Juliet*. During the lesson, when responding to the question, “How powerful is love? Does love have any limits?” Students’ responses included, “Love is one of the strongest bonds between people.”, and “Love is powerful and I believe there are no limits to love.” During the lesson, students also shared their own personal experiences with love and tied it into their responses, with some responses being very personal. However, during a chemistry lab lesson that looked to have students determine the molarity of a base solution and an unknown molarity using a standard acid solution, students were not completely engaged in discussions centered on this topic, a key element in the school’s belief. When asked what the purpose of the lesson was, students responses included, “To make the acid turn pink,” while another group had difficulty getting started as they were not sure what they had to do, which hinders students’ ability to produce meaningful work products.

- Students in a Living Environment class completed worksheets that detailed important key points of comparative embryology. The student responses exhibited knowledge of the subject matter by pointing out how vertebrates have back bones and how “Vertebrate embryos follow a common developmental plan due to a common set of genes.” However, other student documents and work products reviewed lacked in reflecting critical thinking. During an ELA lesson, some students were not engaged and did not produce work products reflecting high levels of thinking. When asked to explain what they were working on, one student stated “Working in a group to answer these questions.” When the teacher asked some students to share their responses, some students did not give an answer, thus the opportunities for all students to engage in and produce high levels of meaningful student work products was uneven.

- During in a ninth-grade ELA lesson, students had multiple opportunities to engage in group and class discussions centered on the question, “Why should (shouldn’t) the United States host an upcoming Olympics?” Student discussions were displayed high levels of thinking and participation with students in the engaged in a healthy and respectful discourse. However, during a different ELA lesson, students were working on the do now section of the lesson which asked them to answer and defend the following, “Working conditions in Bangladesh are bad because; Working conditions in Bangladesh are bad, but; and Working conditions in Bangladesh are bad, so.” Throughout the lesson some students were not engaged, especially when other students were sharing their response yet the level of response did not consistently reflect high levels of analysis, which serves as a missed opportunity to increase the quality of student work products.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

Teachers and school leaders assure that all curricular documents are aligned to the Common Core Learning standards and integrate instructional shifts, most notably writing strategies. Curricula and tasks are refined using data and student work.

Impact

Curricular coherence as well the promotion and access of college and career readiness skills for all students is seen throughout curricular documents and reflect tasks geared to allow access for students.

Supporting Evidence

- The integration of writing strategies, such as the use of main idea, evidence, analysis, and link, (MEAL), is embedded in order to engage and assist students with their thinking and writing skills by helping them identify challenges, cite specific text-based evidence and use that evidence to make a claim. Documents that were part of an ELA lesson plan also included a peer checklist that integrated MEAL as a form of helping students evaluate their peers writing assignment, while a sociology lesson plan uses MEAL in order to have students identify and write about a specific person, the gender they believe that person is and then defend their stance on their gender selection. Thus, planning for the use of MEAL, throughout planning documents across content areas, supports a coherent approach.

- Access for all students was evident throughout planning documents reflecting the use of student data for the development of activities. Documents attached to an Algebra lesson plan listed students by name and modifications to the task that the students may need through the lesson. An eleventh-grade ELA lesson plan grouped students according to their skill level and prior student work so that each group would have a high, medium and low level student. Other lesson plans included a wide variety of scaffolds in tasks such as pictures for visual support, placements/graphic organizers to help students organize their thoughts prior to writing, and the use of technology in order to research and help students understand any questions they may have. Included in many of the plans are the reasons why certain students would need specific scaffolds. For example, in an ELA lesson plan, the teacher listed the student errors in the past and what scaffolds would assist the student for this lesson. In a math lesson plan, specific math skills that students struggle with are listed, along with the scaffold that would support that student.

- A uniform lesson plan ensures the faculty is building coherence in how lessons are planned and aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Lesson plans have clear objectives, identify what students will learn and in many cases how it relates to real world situations. For example, a Geometry lesson plan’s essential question required students to identify how quadratic functions can be used to model situations in the real world. Models offered to the students included how quadratic functions are often used in the firing a rocket or the throwing an object such as a ball. Lesson plans also include examples of higher-order questions in order to challenge students thinking and require students to answer questions verbally and in writing, which connects to the instructional shifts. Additionally, across grades, planning for student discussion is a part of many documents reviewed.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments, rubrics and follow a common grading policy that is aligned to the school’s curricula. Teachers’ assessment practices reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding, including student self-assessment.

Impact

Feedback provided to students is actionable and teachers are making adjustments to instruction in order to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use a variety of ways to check for student understanding during instruction. During classroom visits, teachers could be seen conferencing with individual and groups of students and memorializing those conferences by using a pre-constructed checklist or by taking anecdotal notes. During ELA, classes while students engaged in group discussions, the teacher took notes relative to the student responses. Students also wrote their peers’ responses and the amount of times that specific students responded to each other in order for students to be able to see the amount of times they engaged in discussion and or responded to a peer. The teacher reminded the class that they needed to respond regularly to their peers and used the data from the student tracker to show students the trends associated with the class discussions. The teacher used this data to engage those students who were not actively participating and as a way to pose specific questions to the class based on student responses.

- During the meeting with students, students were able to articulate how teachers provide feedback and how it has impacted them. Many students spoke about the feedback they receive in math classes, which starts with peers giving them feedback prior to the teacher reviewing their work. Overall, students felt that feedback helps them stay focused and organized. One student shared, “It helps us to understand what the teacher is looking for and how we can improve our grade.” Grading policies were clear throughout the school and students were able to share their thoughts about how they are graded and what the academic expectations are in all their classes. Additionally, the school uses mid-marking period check-ins throughout the school year as a way to offer students feedback that is timely and actionable. The protocol uses a response form for teachers to provide student’s their grades, explain why they earned that grade, and opportunities for next steps. During the student meeting, the majority of student responses indicated that teacher feedback during the check-ins is understandable and helpful to them.

- Student self- and peer-assessment was regularly used and seen throughout the school. The teachers have implemented a student self-assessment rubric that is taped to every desk in the school. Teacher lesson plans referenced the use of the self-reflection rubric and students spoke about the regular use of it prior to handing in any assignments. Students also noted how peer and self-reflection is, “something that is a regular part of our day.” Also, students felt that the feedback they receive from the peers was respectful, very helpful to them and timely, especially with Google Classroom as they can log into their accounts and see and respond to the feedback right away. They found this to be very helpful, especially when they are not in school.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate curricular and instructional expectations connected to the Danielson Framework for Teaching as well as partnering with parents by effectively communicating a path to college and careers for their children.

Impact

There is a clear mutual accountability for all expectations and support for student progress towards meeting all expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- All expectations begin with the dissemination of the staff handbook at the start of each school year with every teacher signing off that they have received and read it. The handbook, a detailed document that establishes the school's mission statement, goals and instructional foci, contains many "we believe" statements aligned to both the mission and foci. Furthermore, teachers stated it gives a clear understanding on the expectations of the school's SLCs and how they are a "mechanism for providing every student a greater level of individualized support during their four years of high school." During the meetings, teachers articulated their knowledge of the handbook and what is expected, stating how school leaders are very clear about what is expected throughout the school year. For example, questioning strategies is part of the instructional focus and was observed consistently in classrooms across the school. A review of observations reports and intervisitation notes reflects teachers taking continuously utilizing strategies provided to them by their colleagues and school leaders, especially as it relates to questioning.

- There is a clear partnership between the school and families regarding student progress and preparation for life after high school. The school has vast amounts of workshops designed for both families and students that gives parents support throughout the college application process. During the year, the school hosts workshops that deal with the college financial aid process, specifically how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, (FAFSA). All parents shared that in addition to workshops that detailed how to fill out the application, the school has helped many families personally, one-on-one by assisting them in the actual process of filling out the online application. Parents explained how this also happens on Saturdays. They communicated how based on their feedback, the school hired a high school counselor whose primary responsibility is college and career readiness for families and students. One parents stated and all agreed, "Knowing that there are people here on Saturdays that can help us, is so comforting."

- Teacher teams receive regular feedback from school leaders and administrators directly connected to schoolwide expectations through the school's use of the online platform. School leaders offer teams feedback on their agendas on a daily basis, reminding the teams of instructional and curricular expectations. Teachers shared how helpful it is to know that school leaders are regularly reviewing their work and how the “feedback they provide helps them to focus” and assures that, “Everything we do is aligned to the instructional focus of the school.” A review of several teacher observations across the year, revealed how on several occasions, teachers implemented feedback from school leaders to increase the quality of their assessment practices and questioning strategies connected to their team’s work as well as feedback received in these components from intervisitations. Thus, teachers hold themselves accountable to assure that “all expectations are met throughout the year.”
### Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Findings

School leaders support the development of all teachers by providing them with clear, actionable feedback that celebrates strengths and offer next steps, through a cycle of frequent classroom observations.

#### Impact

Teacher development is supported and offers strategies that strengthens teacher development.

#### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher observations are structured in a way that allows school leaders and teachers to work together. For example, through the intervisitation cycles, teachers and school leaders visit classrooms together, discuss the visits, and formulate clear next steps that offer teachers resources and opportunities such as visiting model teachers. School leaders regularly visit teachers together and then discuss their findings in order to norm the observation process and assure that feedback to teachers is consistent and aligned to the school's instructional focus and the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Specifically, each assistant principal has a subject area they are responsible for, and the principal observes all teachers across all subjects and grades. Teachers expressed their content with the observation process and the feedback they receive, sharing that the feedback is "consistent, timely, and actionable." Teachers also noted how even if a teacher is rated highly effective, there is still always feedback that looks to help them continue to grow.

- Teacher feedback that is timely, actionable and offers clear steps for professional growth was evident throughout documents reviewed. For example, feedback to a teacher following her observation praised the teacher for the differentiated tasks used and for the use of the MEAL template to assist students in literacy. The school leader then offered next steps that included more structure around the reading and annotating process by using models and guided reading strategies. The school leader reminded the teacher that this needs to be implemented right away and that it is expected to be seen the next time the teacher is visited. Other observation reports included feedback that praised a teacher for the use of station teaching as a way to “differentiate the lesson and increase student engagement” but also addressed concerns in the area of planning, as the teacher did not manage their time in an effective way.

- School leaders provide ongoing feedback to teachers that is driven by data and the school's instructional foci. At the beginning of the year, school leaders engage in meetings to address teacher needs. For example, one teacher shared how actionable feedback is something that he needed support in, and as a result professional development opportunities were provided around this strategy and it was referenced throughout the school year in the observation reports. Many teachers talked about the on-going support they receive that is helping strengthen their pedagogical practice. According to recent Advance data, over the past two years teacher performance has increased from 2.65 to 2.88 in domain 3, reflecting growth in instructional practices.