



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Walt Whitman

Middle School 246

**72 Veronica Place
Brooklyn
NY 11226**

Principal: Bentley Warrington

Dates of review: September 24 - 25, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Walt Whitman is a middle school with 787 students from grades 6 through 8. The school population comprises 85% Black, 11% Hispanic, 2% White and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 89.9%. The school does receive Title 1 funding for 85% of students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal empowers the staff through their professional learning communities.
- Student behavior, supported by the academy structure is good and increases engagement.
- There are increasing levels of trust and mutual support between teachers.
- Students appreciate the varied talent and arts program that broadens their horizons.
- Teachers have relevant performance student data, which they access and use through a student database.
- Good procedures are in place to monitor student achievement in English language arts and math.
- The academic intervention team effectively tailors programs to meet students' needs.
- The principal has a clear vision and sees the whole school as a professional learning community.
- Academic programs for special education students and English language learners are effective.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all development plans contain measurable goals, timelines and benchmarks that are effectively shared with all constituents.
- Develop data analysis systems to provide updated, disaggregated information on all groups of interest to the school.
- Use data more effectively to track class, grade, department and academies progress over time.
- Further involve students in the goal setting process and consistently ensure that they know how to reach their targets.
- Develop differentiated teaching and increase the challenge in each class to address the needs of all students.
- Raise levels of attendance and reduce tardiness.

Part 3: Main findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Since his appointment in September 2005 the principal has worked tirelessly to provide a safe environment where students can learn effectively. The school is divided into three academies, each lead by an assistant principal. Each academy has its own identity and the school operates as three schools in one. This has positively affected student behavior. Parents, teachers and students welcome the changes and there is now good engagement in most lessons. Students enjoy the talent and arts program. This gives breadth to the curriculum and allows students to choose from drama, music, visual art, chorus or media. The school is fortunate in its abundance of technology. It uses this well and the principal is always thinking of creative ways in which it can further support student learning. Parents are happy that when students are absent they can access their homework electronically.

The principal sees the school as a learning community and places great importance on professional development. The America's Choice model is working well to remediate difficulties and is strengthening the quality of teaching and learning. This is having a positive impact on student progress. There are a few instances where teachers are differentiating instruction effectively but at present there are inconsistencies of practice. The needs of all students are therefore not being met.

Communication with parents has improved since the last review and parents feel well supported by the principal and teachers. They say that "the door is always open and that no problem is too small". Parents speak very positively about the Helping Involved Parents for Better Schools (HIP program) and particularly like the ease with which they can contact teachers and the informative messages they receive from the principal. The principal acknowledges that some areas for improvement have not progressed as well as he would like. The school is now in a more stable position in terms of staffing. The principal is very aware of what needs to be done and has the support to move more quickly. In English language arts and math there are very clear procedures in place to track student performance and teachers feel well supported by the lead teacher and coach. Teachers now collaborate more and the academy structure allows for cross-department meetings. The principal plans to extend this structure to develop equally robust and consistent practices in science and social studies.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

As well as ensuring that all teachers have the results from State tests, the administration shares interim data results with all members of the school community. The cabinet, the math coach and the academic intervention coordinator work very closely together, meeting on a daily basis to look at student progress. In math and English language arts, systems to track individual progress are very clear. As well as analyzing State and City-wide tests additional formal and informal assessments are made by teachers. Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) are used in English language arts to group students according to their need. Reading books are leveled. In math, unit pretests are used to align instruction. The principal has built flexibility into the schedule to give teachers common planning time. This allows for collaborative work where teachers generate monthly uniform assessments. These give an ongoing picture of each student's performance. The school effectively tracks the progress of special education students and English language learners. Platoweb math supports higher achieving students as well as lower achievers. The web-based multimedia program provides a variety of methods to develop students understanding of each concept. It gives interactive feedback and an alternative tracking system for teachers. The appointment of a new academic intervention services coordinator has already provided greater focus to the data collection process. She has an action plan in place for the academic intervention team with an emphasis on review, revise, refine. Data has been downloaded from nyStart and the administration sees this as a very useful tool to track performance over time and segregate data further. The academic intervention teacher is starting to use the program to track the progress of groups of students.

The progress of different ethnic groups or gender groups has not been tracked nor has the relative performance of the three academies been compared. The school is also aware of the need to track trends across classrooms. Through the America's Choice program teachers have been supported in the use of data to inform planning and track progress. Presently, its use is not consistent amongst teachers or across subject areas. Teachers are aware of this but feel well supported and are eager to develop data driven instruction further.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Staff describe the principal's priority by saying, "He does not want to allow even one child to slip through the cracks." This year's focus is on day-to-day assessment and teachers have a good understanding of students' progress in English language arts and math. The frequency of meetings allows for weekly dialogue about progress. There is clear forward planning and clarity of expectation by teachers, particularly from the assistant principals in math and English language arts. Teachers therefore understand where students need

support and adapt their plans accordingly. The guidance counselor and dean in each academy work closely with teachers and the academic intervention team to support students with the greatest need. Personal intervention plans and individual education plans have clarity, are reviewed on a regular basis and indicate where further support is needed. As a result students with the greatest need are making good progress. The principal clearly understands the student population. This can be seen in the effective programs the school provides for Haitian-Creole and Spanish speaking students. The small student to teacher ratio is further helping students' progress. Parents are positive about the improved communications and feel that over the last two years expectations of students by teachers have improved. In addition to the quarterly report cards, the math and English language arts departments are communicating with parents on a monthly basis. This good practice is being extended to other departments. It is rare that parents contact the school to discuss the learning needs of students.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The students appreciate the school's efforts to encourage the development of their talents through the arts program. The arts teachers meet weekly to plan for performances and discuss how to develop cross-curricular links further to impact on student progress. Technology permeates most curriculum areas and is well used by both students and teachers.

In English language arts there is clear alignment between student outcome and the curriculum, which has resulted in revised curriculum maps for each grade level. Leveled books are available to meet each student's needs. Read 180 is effectively used to support higher achieving students. The focus on literature studies, as well as film studies, is challenging and engaging for students. The pacing calendar in math has been revised based on student data, resulting in instruction being linked to student need. The learning environment in the school is positive and some students know the levels they are performing at and generally feel that teachers have high expectations. However, they are not always certain of what they need to do to progress to the next level. They like lessons with variety and fun and find answering questions from text books less stimulating. In many lessons students are grouped according to their performance level. In social studies, more directed instruction by teachers results in limited challenge to the higher achieving students.

Student attendance and tardiness remain an issue. The previous attendance officer left and there is presently a vacancy. Every effort is made to follow up on absences, and the principal walks in the community, early every morning to encourage punctuality. At present procedures are not sufficiently tight to make the required impact.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school runs smoothly and students behave well. Both students and parents talk about the improvements that have been made during the last two years, resulting in a respectful community. The principal is very visible, constantly supports his staff and is good at mediating in difficult situations. Classroom observations are regularly undertaken by the principal and assistant principals. Regular walk throughs are carried out by administration and provide an accurate picture of the quality of instruction. However, the improvement of teacher instruction throughout the school is inconsistent. Teachers welcome feedback and describe the school as "a place where colleagues collaborate and are willing to share ideas". The math coach and the lead teacher for English language arts, who visit classrooms on a daily basis, further support teachers. They model lessons, give support, and help with conferencing. The principal places great value on professional development and uses a variety of external providers to help his staff grow professionally. His ambition is to encourage all faculty "to have a hunger for knowledge and a need for constant growth". He describes his school as "a professional learning community" where teachers have the opportunity to involve themselves in a large variety of professional development opportunities. The math department has carried out their own needs assessment. They visit each other's classrooms and readily enter into dialogue to evaluate each other's practice. The America's Choice consultants provide support for teachers, encouraging them to strengthen their instruction and consider the impact on student learning. The school also works very closely with Bank Street College in a variety of ways, including working with teachers to improve their lesson planning.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school measures the progress of individual students in English language arts and math. The progress of English language learners, special education students and high achieving students is also tracked. However it does not set quantifiable goals and use the data to track the progress towards meeting the goals within defined periods, nor does it check progress in relationship to the goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The school makes provision to meet individual student need and groups students accordingly. Teachers do not yet differentiate their instruction sufficiently to meet these individual and group needs.

The principal effectively empowers his staff and is very responsive to their professional development requests, which link to improving student progress. The assistant principals in math and English language arts work closely together. They support teachers to use the outcomes of the monthly tests and results from periodic assessments to improve planning. The principal has identified the need to extend this good practice to science and social studies.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Walt Whitman (MS 246)	△	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?		X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?		X			
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?			X		
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?		X			
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?		X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X			
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?			X		
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?		X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?			X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?			X		
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?			X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X		

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to make strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan's interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X		