

Charlotte-Mecklenburg



Quality Review Report

Zebulon B. Vance High School

**7600 IBM Drive
Charlotte NC 28262**

Principal: Philip P. Cauthen

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Lead Reviewer: Angela Cook

Team reviewers: Terri Cockerham, Glenn Byrum

Cambridge Education (LLC)

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Zebulon B. Vance High School is a large high school with 1,845 students from grade 9 through 12. The school is considerably larger than the district's average of 1,151 students. The student population shows a diverse ethnic mix comprising 68.1 percent African-American, 7.7 percent white, 18.5 percent Hispanic, 3.6 percent Asian, 0.4 percent American Indian and 1.8 percent multi-racial students. Nearly half of the students (49.7percent) are eligible for free school lunches and a further 10 percent are eligible for reduced-priced lunches. Of the student population 12.7 percent are exceptional children (EC) and 13.7 percent have limited English proficiency (LEP). This is a Priority School which met 16 out of its 25 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets in 2007-08, and has 58.7 percent of students at grade level. There is a downward trend in suspensions.

The school has had six principals since it in opened in 1997.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The newly initiated senior leadership team, comprising elected members of staff, works collaboratively with the administration in supporting the development of the school.
- The school has a clear shared vision.
- The involvement of instructional staff in school-wide professional development ensures training is relevant to the school's needs.
- Students are justifiably proud of the school's sporting and music achievements.
- Positive professional relationships between students and staff result in calm learning environments in class.
- Students are polite and are good advocates for their school.
- Students behave well in class and many are keen to learn.
- The main school buildings provide a light and attractive environment which is conducive to learning.
- The school offers a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, offers new opportunities to extend students' experiences, and effectively promotes a "spirit day."
- Common planning time in core subjects is used well by staff to share best practices.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve students' experience of learning by ensuring that the content of all lessons is differentiated to meet their varying needs.
- Raise the level of achievement for all students by ensuring they are effectively challenged in all lessons.
- Continue to develop the use of data within the school so that progress for the different groups can be analyzed, and individual student progress can be tracked against his/her expected outcomes in order to improve attainment.
- Continue to develop opportunities to celebrate the diversity of the student population and involve good role models from the community.
- Develop effective strategies to improve parental and local community involvement in the school.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

This is a proficient school.

Zebulon B. Vance High School provides a broad curriculum with a good choice of after-school clubs, but the curriculum is not always differentiated to meet the needs of all students. The school is not complacent about the recent decline in the achievement figures, which it mainly attributes to the shift in the demographics of the student population caused by the opening of a new school nearby. Data is used to identify groups which require additional support, but there is little tracking of individual student's progress. The drive to raise achievement focuses particularly on the lower achieving groups, but this results in some higher achievers being insufficiently challenged. Students' attitude to learning is usually positive, even in classes where instruction is poorly planned. Generally, student behavior is good, and they are welcoming ambassadors for their school. The staff care about the students, and respectful relationships between staff and students support learning in class. The weekly 'spirit day' provides an opportunity for the school to develop its identity. The school has a diverse population of learners, which is a strength that is not yet fully celebrated.

Leadership and management skills are being developed across the school through the introduction of a school leadership team (SLT) and all the staff are invited to attend and participate in the meetings. The school's well-judged self-evaluation form (SEF) was written by the SLT with support in the final stages by the principal. The school acknowledges that an improved quality in the communication process itself and in the consistency of the messages provided across the school is necessary in order to achieve the improvement in learning and teaching. Well-focused in-house professional development opportunities enable staff to coach each other and to share best practices. Strategies to increase the participation of parents and the community in the life of the school are not yet being fully evaluated, and are mainly focused on the school's organizational processes rather than on outreach.

Criterion 1: Achievement

The school demonstrates high levels of academic achievement in the core subjects and the trend of achievement shows improvement at all grades in all subjects. The school uses available student performance data to take and adjust actions to improve the quality of students' learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's regularly-collected assessment data is used both to identify areas where growth is required in order to meet targets, and to compare achievement across the classes so that effective teaching is identified. The opening in 2007 of a new school nearby has resulted in a demographic shift in the student population which has had an impact on the school's achievement data, for instance in 2007 Zebulon B Vance was a School of Progress meeting 89.7 percent of its targets, whereas in 2008 it became a Priority School achieving 64 percent of its targets, with 58.7 percent of its students at grade level.

The 2007-08 North Carolina data for this school clearly indicates that students are capable of achieving well, because in some subjects the school has out-performed both the district and the state. The principal acknowledges that there is under-achievement because the school is concentrating on the growth of lower achieving students. Consequently middle ability and higher achievers are not fully having their needs addressed. The school's analysis of disaggregated student performance data using the end-of-course test results clearly indicates where greatest focus is required. Math has been identified as an area for growth, as there is a difference in achievement in grade 9 of 14 percent between the higher achieving Hispanic students and the African-American students. The administration is aware of differences across subject areas, for example in physical sciences where grade 10 students fared less well in 2008 than in civics and economics, and is working towards reducing the disparity by improving teaching.

Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and those with disabilities are mainly taught in inclusive classes, though there are some self-contained classes. In 2007-08, LEP students were effectively supported in achieving almost in line with non-LEP students in English I and algebra I tests in grade 9.

Criterion 2: Curriculum

The curriculum is relevant and appropriate to the needs of all children, across all grades, and for all sub-groups in the student population.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The curriculum is aligned with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) through the pacing guidelines. Lesson objectives are taken from the NCSCOS and in some classes these are reworded to ensure that the students understand what they will be learning that day. The curriculum offers a wide choice of options including performing arts and music, and the school has a good range of facilities for sport. The Academy of Engineering in Motorsports offers exciting opportunities to students who do not wish to follow the more traditional routes. Students working in this Academy are able to catch up on learning missed in earlier years while pursuing their interest in motorized vehicles. The same hands-on collaborative learning approach does not extend across the curriculum, and developing the curriculum to meet the differing needs of all students is not routinely incorporated into all subject areas. Students say there are limited opportunities for those who learn best through hands-on activities, and for those above grade level the curriculum frequently offers little challenge. There has been a move towards introducing interactive portfolios which the staff consider provides an effective process for capturing learning, although some students say the time spent compiling these files could be better used to further learning.

The school provides a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including band, language clubs and physical activities. Those involved in sports or the band have busy schedules, and the school experiences much success in these areas. The "Growing and Empowering Myself Successfully" (G.E.M.S.) and the "Gentlemen Emerging Notably Together" (GENTS) groups extend students' horizons and broaden their experiences. Those students who are struggling to reach grade level are provided with sufficient additional classes at the end of the school day to catch up on their work.

Criterion 3: Learning and teaching

Student learning, progress and standards are a direct result of challenging instruction and high quality teaching. Decisions are based on use of data and evidence.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The quality of teaching lacks consistency, and the SEF acknowledges that greater teacher accountability is required in order to improve the learning experiences of students. While there are innovative and exciting lessons, too many are of poor quality. Lessons do not consistently meet the differing needs of all students. Observation indicates that students' apparent apathy is a result of poor teaching rather than students' lack of interest in learning. Clear progression is not always in evidence so that there are gaps in students' understanding and links across subject areas are not always made. Differentiation does not occur routinely, and consequently many of the higher achieving students are insufficiently challenged. In lessons where small group work takes place, the collaborative learning is effective and students clearly enjoy their work. Few opportunities are taken to engage students' higher order thinking skills, but where skilful questioning elicits longer answers and challenges individuals to explore their thinking further, students readily engage with the ideas and contribute to the discussion. Where a teacher is absent, insufficient strategies are in place to ensure that all are kept engaged and challenged during the lesson. Not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations for their class, which leaves some learners bored with the level of the work. Lesson planning is not routinely checked and some is inadequate.

Students take a pride in the presentation of their work and many want to achieve well. In carefully-planned interesting lessons, where there is a good pace, students willingly participate, complete their tasks and make pleasing progress. Most teachers have good content knowledge which enables them to provide clear answers for students seeking greater clarification. Lesson objectives provide

students with an understanding of what they will learn in that lesson, although some are not always easily comprehensible. Not all students are set challenging targets, particularly for those who are working at above grade level. In classes where students are actively engaged in developing their own learning, poor behavior is rarely a problem, but where there is little interaction and the lesson is mainly directed by the teacher from the blackboard, some students chat off-task or even doze. Checking of work does not always provide students with sufficient information to enable them to understand how they can improve.

Criterion 4: Leadership and management

The school has a high quality leadership and management team with a clear vision, ambition and goals; a focus on student achievement; a sense of purpose and high aspirations; and strategies which impact directly on students' learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's self-evaluation form (SEF) was completed by the newly established school leadership team (SLT), which comprises fourteen elected members of staff, though all staff are permitted to attend and participate. The SEF acknowledges that there is a need both for improved communication across the school and for greater consistency in the leadership provided by the administrative team. The principal is aware that in order to provide a better learning experience for all students these issues will have to be addressed. The school systems function well and there is an orderly, purposeful school-wide ethos.

The leadership team has a vision, which is widely shared, to ensure that all have the opportunity to achieve. The school is seeking to develop not only its students but also its staff by providing opportunities, for example through the establishment of the SLT, for leaders to be identified at all levels. The staff appreciates the increased visibility of the administration team across the school. Although lessons are observed, the focus is still on teaching rather than learning. It is not clear whether points for improvement are consistently followed through. Each member of the administrative team is responsible for a particular area of the curriculum and scheduling provides each with a day per week for this work. However, in practice the team finds those ring-fenced days frequently have to be set aside as other urgent unforeseen issues arise that require immediate attention.

Data is collected regularly and analyzed, but the analysis is sometimes limited. The principal readily acknowledges that the use of data is not yet maximized, for example tracking individual student progress is not yet in place.

Criterion 5: Learning environment

The school has a safe and orderly environment and makes full use of its available resources, including technology, to directly impact student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The main school buildings offer an inviting, bright learning environment, which is both well maintained and well decorated. Large, light classrooms are personalized by the teachers who use them. Many displays are interesting and informative, and are maintained in good condition. Even intricate posters with disassembled electronic gadgets are not tampered with in any way. The school's 'spirit day' on Fridays is well-conceived and the color orange is worn proudly by staff and students.

The school runs smoothly and strategies are in place to manage difficulties or problems. However, supervision is occasionally minimal which provides opportunities for inappropriate behavior. Students say that their councils are listened to by the staff and that they do have a voice. Attendance, which is below the district's average, is monitored and calls go home when students are not in school, but as some parents fail to provide current contact details not all absences are checked with the family. The school has dramatically reduced its suspension rate, which it attributes partly to the implementation of initiatives such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. This reduction means that more students are in class receiving instruction, and the school estimates this to be a 38.9 percent increase in instructional opportunities. The school provides student support

services, but no-one has the complete overview of each student's progress across all subjects. Discipline guidelines are not consistently applied across the school.

Teachers and students respect each other, and positive professional relationships support good behavior in class. The staff care about their students and want them to do well. Many are very dedicated, and the students appreciate the additional support and guidance they are provided with. Around the school students are courteous and always willing to help visitors. Students say there is little bullying, but there are ethnic groups which do not engage with each other. Celebration of diversity is not used effectively to encourage respect and regard for all groups.

Criterion 6: Involvement of parents and the community

The school has a range of regular, two-way methods for communicating with parents, guardians and the wider community and takes steps to encourage active engagement in the education of their children and involvement in the life of the school.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Regular meetings are in place both to support parents who speak little English in understanding school requirements and documentation, and to give guidance in ways to promote their children's learning. Staff say they call students' families not only when there is a problem, but also when there are positive comments to be made, and parents much appreciate this contact. The school sends information home regularly about students' progress, including progress reports. However, as parents do not always provide up-to-date contact details the school's database is not current and some parents cannot be contacted. The school agrees this is a significant problem which they are seeking to address. Some parents say they have good e-mail contact with staff, but not all families, including some for whom English is a second language, are able to use this method of contacting the school.

The school acknowledges that the strategies it has put in place to encourage greater participation by parents and the community are not fully effective. The school improvement plan identifies a number of actions to be taken to improve the school's responsiveness to parents and the community, but little is planned to develop the outreach of the school. There are some workshops to enable parents to support their children's education, but the scheduling of these offers little flexibility.

A small core of dedicated parents is actively involved in supporting the school. There is minimal monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of strategies to encourage families to participate in the school's events, and consequently it is hard to develop effective strategies to attract the more difficult-to-reach families. Attendance at the school's social events is better than at the parents' conferences. The principal admits that school can be intimidating for some adults, but there is little in place to reach out to those for whom this is true. Very few families responded to the family questionnaire, but of those that did a third said they had not been to a meeting during the last year. Parents who speak no English do not always get a Connect Ed phone call in their language, nor are all the school's documentation and newsletters routinely provided in different languages.