



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Virgil I. Grissom School

Middle School 226

**121-10 Rockaway Boulevard
Queens
NY 11420**

Principal: Sonia Nieves

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Reviewers: Alan Geller/ Bruce Berry

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Virgil I. Grissom Middle School located in the South Ozone Park section of Queens is a large intermediate school with 1736 students in grades 6 through 8. The school population is comprised of 49% Black, 21% Hispanic, 28% Asian and 2% White students. The school is eligible for Title 1 status with a rate exceeding 73%, which is above similar and City schools. There are 152 students (9%) receiving special education service in either self-contained or collaborative team teaching classes. There are 69 (4%) English language learners, who receive a push-in mode of instruction. The attendance rate is approximately 90% which is slightly below similar and City schools.

The school was restructured two years ago into 4 separate smaller learning academies.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a focused leader who is well respected by the students, staff and parents and has created a positive learning environment.
- Tracking of data to note performance progress is developing.
- Smaller learning communities have been established within each grade, to meet the individual needs of students better.
- Teachers have high expectations for their students and are committed to providing each child with the skills to achieve.
- The parents feel well respected valued and are very pleased with the variety of challenging educational programs.
- School procedures and routines are a primary focus of the school leaders and the faculty which has resulted in a school that operates efficiently.
- Budgetary decisions are based upon the academic needs of the students which correlate well to the staffing and scheduling plans.
- Students feel well respected by their teachers resulting in classrooms where students are engaged in the instructional programs.
- A collaborative spirit exists amongst the staff which is exhibited at school wide meetings.
- The overall tone is positive creating a school where children feel safe, supported and enjoy learning.

What the school needs to improve.

- Utilize a common system for the collection, tracking and monitoring of student performance progress to efficiently measure the mastery of skills.
- Continue to develop a more consistent school wide grading policy to measure student progress in all subject areas more accurately.
- Continue to provide training opportunities for staff to differentiate instruction further for all students.
- Continue to provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other and participate in self and peer evaluation activities.
- Further systematize the way the school monitors and assesses the effectiveness of school programs.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school was recently restructured into four small learning communities resulting in greater opportunities for teaching teams to share ideas, practices and ensures that all students are well known to core groups of staff. The school runs efficiently and students are engaged by the variety of educational activities and programs. The principal is a focused leader who has high expectations for the students and supports the staff to effect positive changes for the school. A mutual respect exists between the students and the staff resulting in a positive learning environment. The school has high expectations for the students which are evident in their positive attitudes towards the instructional program. Although there is a large student population, there is a good school tone due to the collaborative efforts of the school leaders and the teachers. These efforts are evident in the way the school is focused on setting targeted challenging goals and plans.

Tools to collect and track data have been developed by the school leaders, but are not consistently used throughout the school to monitor student progress. The plan for monitoring has been developing yet needs to be further systematized. There is some good practice in assessment and its use to guide instruction as a means to plan next steps, yet this is also not consistent across the school. A next step for the school is to develop additional ways to differentiate instruction and to improve feedback given to students to allow them to further improve their work. Parents are very pleased with the challenging programs and the accessibility and willingness of the principal to develop a school where children are safe and enjoy learning.

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 student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects and analyzes data as a means of tracking student progress of individuals, classes and the grade across the school, yet this is not consistent across the school. Standardized scores are analyzed to develop class groupings such as the gifted and talented classes in each grade as well as to gather and analyze information to improve instruction. The subgroups of English language learners and special education students are carefully tracked resulting in specific class and intervention programs to improve progress. This has resulted in both groups achieving their Average Yearly Progress in mathematics, but not as of yet in literacy. Using this data, additional plans have been developed to provide further support for these students. The school is also aware of a disparity in the scores of boys and girls and this is accounted for as plans are developed. Students living in shelters, who are not as stable, based upon their attendance records, are a focus area to provide them with additional academic support.

Data is gathered from learning walks and 'snapshots', to note the level of learning and the quality of the teaching. This information is discussed with the professional development team and follow-up support is provided for the staff. This is having a positive effect on the school where there is an upward trend in State cores, except for grade 8.

The school compares itself to similar schools within its network to identify successful practices which are then implemented. Discussions with other school leaders are held on a regular basis. The principal keeps records of the past performance of students and shares these with the cabinet and with the grade level teams of teachers so they know their students better. The school leaders compare the progress of students by grade and by class to ensure progress and the effectiveness of teaching, yet some of the information needed is not readily available.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The analysis of the goals identified for students in the Comprehensive Educational Plan is a collaborative team effort which involves the school leaders, teachers and parents. Pacing calendars are used to ensure that each subject area curriculum is fully implemented on a timely basis to reach goals. Samples of student work are maintained as another means to monitor the implementation of school plans. Daily visits to observe practices are discussed by the school leaders at cabinet meetings as a way to set challenging goals and develop plans. The school leaders scrutinize teachers' to help determine their strengths and areas for improvement in instruction and receive feedback and support to improve their performance. The cabinet reviews data on a weekly and monthly basis to analyze the progress in subject areas, grades and classes yet this needs to be further developed to include individual student's progress.

The cabinet meets specifically twice a year to review the goals and to determine how well they will be met. The school is focused on developing intervention plans for students in greatest need and additional staff has been secured to work in academic intervention programs to support these students. English language learners and special education students are well served by the plans developed to meet their needs, resulting in higher achievement levels for both groups of students.

The school is recognized by parents and students for having high expectations. The staff is very clear about the school goals and communicates them clearly to all. Parents feel that the school shares its expectations and goals with them. They are included in the planning of the Comprehensive Education Plan and are a valued part of the school community. The school leaders share data with the staff and they meet during common planning time to further develop plans to reach school goals. The school is constantly focused on identifying resources to further support students. The school shares information with the students about school plans and goals and surveys them about their feelings about school matters. The students view the school positively in that they are made to feel that they are an important part of it.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school uses the mandated curriculum and utilizes additional supplementary materials that provide assessment tools that provide indicators of student progress. In addition, time schedules are established for the implementation of school plans in all subject areas. Teachers have begun to differentiate instruction, yet this practice is only just beginning and has not become established as well as the monitoring of these practices. Teachers have started to conference with students in small groups about their progress. Groups tend to change based upon their needs. Teachers regularly provide feedback to students concerning their writing pieces, yet this commentary is not specific enough so that students know exactly what they need to do to improve.

A formal common planning time has been scheduled on a weekly basis for core teams to meet and plan. This is an integral part of the academy structure and one example of how scheduling is used to positively impact upon educational plans. Additionally, students receive on a weekly basis more time on task by using block scheduling. Additional staff was secured to provide academic intervention services to students in greatest need in English language arts and mathematics is an example how budgetary and staffing decisions are aligned. As a result of the leadership of the principal, school programs have improved as well as the school tone resulting in classes where students are engaged.

The teachers are committed to helping each child to do well. Students feel that they are respected by their teachers, as they are encouraged to reach the high expectations that are planned for them. Teachers are scheduled to work in core teams with fewer students allowing them to know them better. Due to these measures, students react positively and try hard in their classes, and positive relationships have developed whereby each child trusts an adult for support. A team led by an assistant principal actively focuses on improving attendance, which is improving. Teachers support this effort by calling parents. The team provides additional backup and incentives for excellent attendance, which accounts for the improvement.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal and a committee select staff based upon their commitment to work collaboratively by using the data in their grade teams and their understanding and willingness to work with middle school students. As the school has developed a better tone, more teachers are staying longer to work with their colleagues which has accounted for some better developed planning and teaching. New staff receives specific training in classroom management skills by visiting classes under direct supervision which has minimized class disruptions and improved teaching.

The professional development plan is based upon the needs of the students and the staff. Training for teachers is focused on improving the instructional program such as a study group formed to develop strategies to use differentiated instruction. Staff receive training in using and understanding the data. This is developing and teachers participate in

activities on a regular basis. A benefit of a comprehensive school reform grant was extra time was provided, using an outside consultant, to further train the faculty, which resulted in developing the capacity of the staff to serve as a resource for learning from each other. The principal and assistant principals frequently observe classrooms both informally and formally which further informs professional development. The principal creates a log of her observations which are discussed at cabinet. Decisions are made to determine who needs help and how much. Teachers receive constructive feedback which they accept positively. Teachers who need additional support receive training from one of the coaches or a staff developer. Teachers observe each other and initiate these observations based upon their needs yet this is inconsistent in providing more opportunities for staff to participate in peer- and self-evaluation activities.

The subject area team approach has promoted discussions based upon evaluating student results, planning of lessons and revision of plans, yet the evaluation of individual student results are not consistent enough across the school. The principal is well respected in that she supports the staff and students and models what she expects. Under her leadership, the academy structure started which has been one important factor in improving school tone. She has confidence in her staff and they repay this by working hard with the students. This has resulted in a safe school that runs efficiently on a daily basis. The school partners with the Queens Child Guidance Center and Mercy First which are two community organizations that provides additional support to students in need with academic work.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school leaders utilize the Comprehensive Educational Plan to measure goal achievement and as a standard for revising plans which is not sufficiently systematized. The school leaders monitor the instructional practices by observing classrooms and then analyzing the effectiveness of teaching and learning within the cabinet and at common planning meetings. Bulletin boards are reviewed to note the quality and rigor of student work as a means to judge student needs and progress, as well as the work in student portfolios yet this is not sufficiently systematized. Practice tests are given in English language arts and mathematics and the results are analyzed to note student progress. The school developed document-based questions in the area of social studies as a means of developing the writing and critical thinking of students in this area.

The professional development team responded well to this whole school need, yet the school at this time is not involved in comparing results individually and across grades of these and other assessments. Although the staff is beginning to assume responsibility for analyzing student's progress and for planning and evaluating progress this process is not consistent especially as it relates to individual student progress. The principal regularly monitors all aspects of the school, and if necessary makes changes such as improving the academic intervention plan with more structured programs that are proving to be more effective. School structures such as the professional development team are developing and through a more collaborative spirit are able to make changes more effectively.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Virgil I. Grissom Middle School (IS 226)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

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 student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 	X		
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and 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 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.	X		
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	