



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

Dates of review: March 17 - 18, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Barbara Kwiecinski

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Virgil I. Grissom is a middle school with 1,669 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 49% Black, 20% Hispanic, 2% White, and 29% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 88.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 58% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The content-rich curriculum, Core Knowledge, engages grade 6 students who are making good progress.
- The principal has clarity of vision and is a positive role model, working collaboratively with administration to support all staff and students.
- Interdisciplinary work is expanding and, through effective teamwork, teachers are differentiating lessons to meet students' needs.
- Accelerated classes at all grades challenge students, who produce work of high quality.
- The coaches provide positive support and training related to need, based on research and best practice.
- The new data tracking systems provide teachers with accessible data on all students at class, grade and subject level and enables them to understand student performance.
- The student goal setting process allows students to be reflective thinkers and identify the areas they need to improve in English language arts and math.
- The many intervention programs raise students' self esteem and effectively support students with the greatest need and English language learners.
- The after-school activities complement and extend the school's wide curriculum, engage students and enhance learning.
- The school is a collaborative community and new teachers feel very well supported.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to work with the few teachers who are reluctant to change and develop strategies of support in order to improve instruction.
- Refine the goal setting process so that all plans have quantifiable goals and success measures.
- Further develop partnerships with parents enabling them to support their students' learning.
- Share effective management strategies across academies in order to support teachers according to their need.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The drive and determination of the principal, linked to her enthusiasm, result in a collaborative learning community where teachers work together to support students in their learning journey. New systems and structures are in place to track progress more effectively. This is as a result of last year's Quality Review. The school's results are improving and the integration of English language learners and special education students in the Read 180 program gives students the confidence to access literature and improve their reading. The introduction of four academies to keep education on a human scale has been successful and two of them provide examples of best practice in leadership and management.

The support of the coaches is welcomed by all teachers and the vibrant teacher center provides an environment where colleagues work together to discuss strategies to improve their instruction. Effective support gives teachers the confidence to integrate technology into their teaching. This is one of many examples of how teachers gain confidence, reflect on practice and bring greater variety to their lessons. Students like lessons that are exciting and where connections can be linked to other subject areas. In the grade 6 Core Knowledge curriculum students' design of vases with Greek ornaments reinforces their individual PowerPoint presentations in social studies on aspects of ancient Greek society. This results in high student engagement and good progress. Students enjoy the wide range of after-school activities and speak proudly of the high-quality school band and chorus. The enthusiasm of the music teachers linked to their high expectations gives students the confidence to perform publicly and share their talents with other schools.

The work of the inquiry team is developing and in addition to tracking progress within the classroom, inquiry selected students attend the Read 180 program. Progress is being carefully tracked and there is evidence of improved student performance. Since the last review the school has worked very hard to give teachers the skills to differentiate instruction. Systems are in place to support all teachers to use data to inform instruction. There are many examples of good practice and administration is working very hard to support the few teachers who are reluctant to change.

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 well developed.

The school has a new tracking system and as a result, all staff have consistent and accurate information on all students, classes, grades and subjects. This is a collaborative

learning community and transparent protocols are now in place to identify communication lines for the gathering and dissemination of data. These clearly define responsibilities. Greater sharing of practice results from the formation of four academies and allows teachers to plan together. The careful support for grade 6 students who work in self-contained classes and the effective collaborative team teaching classes in grades 7 and 8 have positive effects on progress. In addition, the academic intervention team and the inquiry team work closely together. English language learners form part of the inquiry teams' students and the decision to include them in the Read 180 program provides another dimension to tracking students in these two sub-groups. This gives students the opportunity to use technology on an individual basis to aid their learning and receive instant feedback on their progress. The progress of high-achieving students is tracked and, in order to raise their achievement levels, accelerated classes are offered in all grades. The school carefully tracks the progress of underperforming grade 8 boys who have difficulties in attending school. They receive specialized support in a program designed to improve their progress. The new data systems allow the school to make comparisons to past and present performance. As a consequence, similar schools are visited; positive initiatives are shared and, if appropriate, are incorporated into the school's schedule.

All teachers feel well supported by the coaches and administration and are beginning to use data very effectively. Students see the value of using Acuity to identify their strengths and weaknesses in mathematics and like to compare their performance to their friends.

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.

The school's priorities clearly link to school data and the principal's performance review goals. The administration is very collaborative and as a team decides whole-school priorities that underpin all improvement plans. The principal believes that goals cannot be reached if staff professional development is not of high enough quality to give teachers the tools to improve practice. As a consequence, clear plans are in place to move the whole school forward and, in addition coaches, work hard with teachers on an individual basis to provide differentiated support.

Each academy has its own goals relating to student need. The Core Knowledge program, aiming to raise sixth grade progress, has had an impact on achievement. High-quality work of sixth grade students is well displayed in hallways and shows very clear links between social studies and art. All students have their own individual goals in English language arts and math. These are clearly described at the front of student portfolios and students reflect on their progress towards them on a weekly basis. It is the school's intention to extend this good practice to other subject areas. Teacher-student conferencing is of high quality and this gives another opportunity for teachers and students to celebrate strengths and work on weaknesses. Students with the greatest need are well supported and clear, individual academic intervention sheets carefully track student progress. The school looks for every opportunity to individualize support, proudly celebrates the art work of students who have poor language skills and uses this as a tool to motivate and support. The annually reviewed staff handbook clearly articulates expectations and the large majority of teachers respond very positively.

Communication with parents is good and the parent coordinator works tirelessly with members of the community to support parents and give them the confidence to be further involved in school life. On an individual basis parents feel confident to work with the

parent coordinator but, collectively, responses to whole-school parent initiatives revolve around a small supportive core and not enough parents are involved.

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 well developed.

The use of data to inform instruction has extended rapidly during this academic year. As a result teachers feel more confident to differentiate instruction to meet students’ need. In a good social studies lesson, grade 6 students collaboratively discuss their PowerPoint presentations related to Women’s History month. Students are grouped according to the skill they need to develop. They ably articulate this and receive excellent support from their teacher. High-quality student work with positive development points results in students feeling proud of their work and an increased desire to succeed. High-achieving students respond positively to accelerated classes in all grades. Grade 8 students like the opportunity to study Spanish and recognize its value in gaining additional credits for high school.

Arts and music are an integral part of the curriculum. Good art displays with clear rubrics support students in translating their names into ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. Techniques such as layering, overlapping and the use of light and dark resulted in high quality work. The links between art and social studies is very clear and through this, students better understand aspects of different societies. Music teaching is good and as a result students’ confidence and self esteem is greatly increased.

The principal works very closely with each assistant principal who has responsibility for an academy. The principal reads every lesson observation carried out by her colleagues and collectively they plan strategies to ensure that students learn in positive, supportive learning communities. There are many excellent classrooms where graded student work is displayed and rubrics are very clear. Students speak positively about the support they get from teachers and like those who “teach with emotion and make learning fun”. In a few instances, teachers are not putting the school vision into practice and this results in instruction not engaging students. All scheduling decisions are based on students’ needs and additional funding to support grade 8 students with low attendance is in place. They attend school at different times compared to other students and as an incentive start the day with gym. This is positively affecting their attendance but at present the academic interest of these students is not strong.

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 well developed.

One of the school’s key goals is to provide high-quality professional development to improve the quality of instruction. All teachers have well organized data portfolios which are updated on a regular basis. In order to use data effectively all teachers receive one-on-one support to help them interpret from all data sources to plan for the needs of individuals and groups of students. The focus on teacher self-assessment is strong. Very structured conversations between teachers and administrators allow them to share outcomes of formal, informal and walk through observations. The assistant principals are at different stages in their career development and are learning from each other in terms

of giving effective feedback to move teachers forward. This is part of their professional development and is carefully monitored by the principal. The coaches give very effective individualized professional development in addition to turn-keying strategies from their own researched, best practice training. Intervisitations are frequent and teachers visit classrooms related to their need. Visitations are also carried out at middle schools that are designated as having areas of outstanding practice so that practice can be refined. In addition to a mentor, new teachers have buddy teachers. This results in consistent support and teachers developing quickly.

Students feel very comfortable in the school and appreciate the support of teachers and the guidance counselors. They say, "there is always someone to turn to." The school provides a caring environment all students. Many effective partnerships support the growth of the whole child. Mercy First and Queens Child Guidance are just two examples where students' physical and emotional development are supported. External partnerships also aid literacy development. Students assume managerial positions in virtual workplaces and use literacy and math skills to make decisions and solve problems.

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 use of the School Improvement Plan to drive the school forward in all subject areas is developing. The school has very clear structures in place to track students' progress in English language arts and math. However, at present the school does not have a clear structure in place to evaluate interim progress towards goals within suitable timeframe in all subject areas. Plans have clear timeframes and review points and students' individual goals are continuously refined. The use of Learning Directions supports the process giving teachers clear visual records of student's gains or slippage. This results in students receiving targeted support through a variety of interventions. There are examples of very good practice within two academies where teachers are very well supported, strategic decisions are made and practice is modified. This is developing in the other two academies. Students are aware of this and identify differences in the learning environments and the goal setting processes.

The variety of professional development opportunities including 'lunch and learn', study groups, video tape of specific sessions for teachers who have not been able to attend a workshop all result in teachers refining their practice. As a result student progress is improving. Students are now involved in their own assessment and have a better understanding of how to make improvements in their work.

The principal is highly respected by all members of the community and encourages all staff and students to do better. This results in a community where staff and students feel valued and work together to understand student need and through structured interim and State assessments alter practice and meet individual student need.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

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|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: Virgil I Grissom Middle School | Δ | ▷ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
| 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 . . . | Δ | ▷ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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 . . . | Δ | ▷ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, 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 and tardiness? | | | | 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, and effectively address discipline related incidents? | | | | 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 makes 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 |

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|---|--|
| ◇ | Outstanding |
| + | Well Developed |
| ✓ | Proficient |
| ➤ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features |
| Δ | Underdeveloped |