

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Virgil I. Grissom School

Middle School 226

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

Principal: Sonia Nieves

Dates of review: December 8 - 10, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Michele Lloyd-Bey

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 47% Black, 19% Hispanic, 1% White, and 31% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 90.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 58% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal is a determined and dedicated leader whose passion for her school has resulted in improved student performance and progress. Middle School 226 is a place where staff and students say they want to be. Through open-house visits, newsletters, and progress reports, the school has implemented improved communication systems. As a result, parents know the expectations of the principal, and support her in her work. The school's sophisticated data tracking system enables staff to analyze student achievement and progress accurately in order to effectively plan next steps for students. A lot of focused attention has been given to English Language Learners and students with special needs but there is insufficient focus on other subgroups to enable the school to capture the achievement levels of all groupings of students. The Comprehensive Educational Plan is a crucial document and is used to set goals and objectives for the school based on data that is constantly analyzed by the leadership. Through the implementation of rubrics and conferencing, teachers develop goals for students. However, too few students have played an active role in identifying their next step learning and, as a result, many are unable to articulate either their personal or learning goals. The principal's decision to extend the Core Knowledge Program has enhanced the interdisciplinary connections within the art and social studies program. Teachers comment that the collaboration has improved students' academic performance and strengthened the Core Knowledge Program.

The school uses student data from Acuity periodic assessments and unit tests to carefully monitor students in jeopardy of slipping below performance levels. Students in need of support are provided with immediate academic intervention services and monitored closely. There is a high level of respect amongst the leadership and staff, which translates into increased motivation and collegiality. However, the school's Learning Environment Survey Report identified a need for better student to student relationships, and this is acknowledged by the school. The school presently collaborates with an external partner to improve staff and students' skills in conflict resolution and peer-mediation but too few students participate in programs that promote other aspects of academic and personal growth. Programs such as READ 180 have shown to have positive student outcomes and as a result, the principal extended its implementation across all grades. Through effective professional development, the school has trained staff to use data effectively, identify benchmarks for student progress and monitor student performance at regular intervals. Teachers work collaboratively with the leadership and coaches to use the outcomes of monitoring to plan and re-evaluate students' goals. The school is building on Inquiry Team work which has focused on data analysis and evaluation, to develop and share effective strategies that respond to and support students' individual needs.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's comprehensive data management system provides an accurate and up to date record of student progress and performance that staff use effectively to monitor student performance and progress.
- Collaborative efforts to develop the Comprehensive Educational Plan have resulted in a deliberate school-wide focus on the principal's goals.
- The Core Knowledge Program has been successful in promoting student interest and engagement and has been extended to include the integration of art and social studies and benefit students across all grades.
- Strategic organizational decisions have enabled the school to implement academic intervention services to support student achievement.
- Reflective professional development has enabled teachers to refine their practice and has improved student outcomes across the school.
- The school makes good use of data from periodic assessments to ensure that students consolidate and build on prior learning and achieve academic success.

What the school needs to improve

- Monitor the progress of all subgroups and ensure that their different needs are fully addressed.
- Further develop students' involvement in the goal-setting process so that they can better understand and articulate their learning goals.
- Continue to extend collaborations with outside partnerships in order to increase student-to-student appreciation and respect.
- Encourage the sharing of good practice between the Inquiry Team and teachers in order to increase the impact of the school's work on students' learning.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The entire school is committed to addressing the needs of students through the ongoing review and evaluation of data. While the school gathers and analyzes data from a variety of sources, the use of the Learning Directions Tracking System has enabled school leaders and staff to view student data in a much more detailed manner. This sophisticated web-based data system is customized to strategically track and assess students' progress and identify patterns and trends over a period of five years. All teachers have data folios created in the tracking system that reflect timely data in core subjects. The system disaggregates data, thereby allowing the school to review the performance and progress of individual and groups of students. The inquiry target tool is also helpful in enabling the school to make an effective analysis and evaluation of the performance of English Language Learners and special education students. Both data tracking systems provide real time data, thus allowing the school to respond expeditiously to negative trends and static student growth. As a result of their careful analysis of data of special education and English Language Learner subgroups, for example, school leaders were able to identify underachievement and make informed strategic decisions to track progress and monitor these groups' performance more rigorously. However, this process does not extend to other subgroups, such as boys or different ethnic minorities whose progress is not routinely monitored and evaluated.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. Class based websites have enhanced communication between parents and the school to provide timely and up-to-date information regarding students' attendance and academic performance.

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.

School leaders convene daily during early morning planning sessions to review and discuss student data. Each assistant principal meets regularly with teachers and coaches to analyze and evaluate data on student progress and set goals and timeframes for raising each student's achievement. By using the data tracking system and ongoing assessment data teachers have accurate and up-to-date information to plan the next learning steps for individual students. Working closely with the administration teachers analyze the data from unit tests and periodic assessments and use the information in preparing next step learning goals for students. Staff track student progress against their goals, setting new goals based on incoming data and documenting these in teachers' data folios. There is common planning time where

teachers volunteer to engage in professional meetings in order to analyze data and collaboratively plan lessons targeted on student need. Data contained in the tracking system and the school's Progress Report is collaboratively analyzed and used to create the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan.

Student progress reports specify personal and learning goals for students and are shared with students and their families during open houses and parent-teacher conferences. These reports have been critical in ensuring that students and their families are provided with relevant periodic information regarding their child's on-going performance and progress. However, while adults in the school engage in the goal setting process, students themselves are not sufficiently engaged in setting and monitoring their own learning goals.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

All aspects of instructional planning are continuously reviewed by the leadership and cross-curricular links are made to strengthen students' academic performance and provide an engaging and challenging curriculum. The school's commitment to the arts is demonstrated by its support for a school-wide chorus and four art teachers. The collaboration formed by art and social studies teachers has effectively linked with the school's Core Knowledge Program to enhance and extend interdisciplinary connections. The school has built on this good practice. Based on positive results from the art and social studies teachers' collaborative planning, all students now participate in interdisciplinary art and social studies lessons that produce art artifacts to illustrate connections between art and history.

The leadership has rightly prioritized the implementation of differentiated instruction. Teachers use academy planning time to analyze data and prepare differentiated lessons that are aligned to student needs. Through on-going professional development and experience of inter-visitation, teachers across the school receive regular training that has enhanced their knowledge of data analysis and their ability to design lessons that address students' individual needs. The principal makes strategic organizational decisions which improve students' performance, for example, by deploying academic intervention teachers and coaches to ensure that students and classroom teachers are well supported. Through constant analysis of student data, students in greatest need, as well as students identified as slipping in performance, are provided with effective academic intervention services. Intervention teachers make good use of the data tracking system in addition to other computer generated data systems to monitor students' growth in order to differentiate their instruction or plan for flexible groups.

There is a high level of trust and respect amongst the leadership and staff. As a result there is a willingness for adults to support each other to plan for student achievement. Teachers volunteer for workshops, study groups and extend their time to ensure that their colleagues are supported. However, based on the school's Learning Environment Survey Report, there is a need to improve students' level of respect for each other, especially as it relates to relationships outside of the school.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

There are good systems for supporting and developing new and veteran teachers. Teachers' comment positively regarding high levels of continuous support provided at the school. Central to the improvement of teacher and student growth are the coaches who work alongside of the supervisor assigned to one of the four academies to provide continuous school-level and differentiated professional development. As a result of strategically targeted professional development, teachers have improved their skills in the analysis of data and can determine accurately next steps for student learning. The Inquiry Team effectively analyzes target student population data in Acuity and other assessments in order to make meaningful instructional decisions for students in greatest need. The school plans to build on this work, but at present the impact of the team's work is limited because it does not share its findings sufficiently with other staff.

In response to concerns about student-with-student relationships, the school is working with an external partner to train guidance counselors to turn-key conflict resolution and peer-mediation strategies for teachers and establish a "Global Kids" program for 25 students within the school. There is scope to extend the range of external partnerships so that a greater number of students can be included in programs to enhance students' academic and personal growth.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 implementation of Acuity as a periodic assessment has been effective in helping the school set interim goals for students based on item skills analysis. Teachers make good use of this tool to check periodically to ensure that students are on target and making expected progress. Teachers develop benchmarks and use them in core subjects to assess student progress at regular intervals. Staff have made good use of the school's computerized tracking system to regularly examine students' achievement and monitor and revise groupings.

Because communication within the school and to parents is good, the principal's expectations for the school and her vision are shared by the whole school community. As a result staff work together to achieve the school's goals. Based on data on student achievement and progress, the principal has continued the school's commitment to the READ 180 program and also implemented a web-based math intervention program designed to involve students in monitoring their own progress. Classroom teachers collaborate with intervention teachers to share data and discuss students' performance. The administration's use of snapshots as a classroom observation tool enables them to consistently monitor the instructional practices of teachers to ensure that they are addressing the needs of all students. Staff convene at the close of the school year to review end of the year data and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan and its programs. They use this evaluation in a reflective and collaborative process, to determine the procedures and systems that will be put into place to improve instruction and support students in the following year.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Virgil I. Grissom Middle School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		X		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?		X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DY0, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		X					
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?		X					
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X				
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed