

Quality Review **Report**

2008-2009

Validus Preparatory Academy

High School 263

1595 Bathgate Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457

Principal: Brady Smith

Dates of review: December 10 – 11, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Sue Alton

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Validus Preparatory Academy is a high school with 432 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33% Black, 65% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 32% of the students enrolled and girls account for 68%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 80%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 88% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The principal is very well respected by the whole school community who appreciate his availability and his concern for each student. As a result all staff work cohesively. They are very focused on the vision to “help students understand the issues of community health and to provide them with the tools to make changes within their community,” as they pursue careers in health and other professional services. Leadership is effectively delegated at all levels. Staff and students are proactive and take responsibility for their respective roles in the achievement of whole school goals. The whole school community is actively engaged in developing the Comprehensive Education Plan. Roles and responsibilities for achieving the goals within this are carefully defined. Although interim goals and timeframes for evaluation are articulated, they are not yet systematically recorded as part of the school’s self evaluation process. Progress is carefully monitored and adjustments are made, but again, these are not always recorded as part of self evaluation.

Very good systems to gather, manage and analyze data, including use of technology, result in effective use of data to inform groupings. Data analysis provides a detailed picture of each student’s strengths and areas for development which are used as the basis for discussion with students and parents to evaluate learning and set goals. The very effective and carefully thought out extension of the inquiry team promotes a whole-school approach to using data to improve student achievement.

The extensive range of opportunities for students and teachers to meet, including advisory sessions and student-led conferences, encourage frequent dialogues about learning. These meetings support students very well in developing independence in their learning and understanding what they need to do to improve. As one student said, “Teachers inspire me and other students.” “It’s a connection,” a parent observed. Carefully planned professional development supports school goals. Individual professional development plans ensure that teachers understand clearly their personal goals. However, evaluation processes do not yet ensure that professional development fully impacts on instruction. An example of this is that data is used inconsistently to plan differentiated instruction based on previous achievement and learning to ensure that all students are suitably challenged.

The broad curriculum including technology, arts, sport and leadership opportunities, provides a very good range of opportunities for students to learn about health and fitness. This motivates students very successfully, helping them to understand how health issues impact on life and achievement. The availability of a professional fitness room supports students very well in putting theory into practice, supporting them to develop healthy lifestyles.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The highly respected principal has a clear vision and high expectations which are exemplified in the strong and cohesive learning community.
- Leadership and responsibility are delegated effectively and communicated well across the school, resulting in all staff contributing to and sharing ownership of goals and decisions.
- The Comprehensive Education Plan is a systematic process carefully developed with the whole school community, using data very effectively to identify issues and priorities.
- The good range of opportunities for students and staff to meet reinforces high expectations and ensures that students are active in their own learning through tracking and evaluating progress and goal setting.
- Effective systems, including the use of technology to collect, manage and analyze data, support whole school planning and decision making very well and provide a detailed picture of each student's strengths and areas for development.
- The extension of the inquiry team, following an evaluation of the previous year, ensures good communication of the project, effectively supporting the school's processes to use data to improve student achievement.
- The broad curriculum, focusing on health and fitness, motivates and engages students, provides good opportunities to reinforce learning across subjects and is enhanced by very good enrichment opportunities.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all staff use the good range of data that they collect to plan differentiated instruction, based on previous achievement and learning, to suitably challenge all students.
- Refine systems to monitor and track the impact of professional development to ensure that it is reflected in classroom practice to support student learning.
- Further refine processes to record the evaluation of progress against short term goals and any adjustments made, as part of the school's self evaluation processes.

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 well developed.

The school continually reviews its very good systems for collecting, recording and analyzing data, resulting in a systematic, whole school approach to data use. Administration and faculty are very skilled at customizing assessments to meet the needs of the school and students. The extensive range of formal and informal assessment data is well managed through computerized systems. These provide administrators, faculty and teachers with a clear understanding of the progress of students within classes, across grades and in all core subjects for individuals and subgroups. The progress of students with special education needs and English language learners is closely monitored against their personal goals to ensure that they are on track to achieve these. Very effective data analysis supports the identification of key priorities in the Comprehensive Education Plan, for example the new whole-school goal to improve the achievement of girls in math.

Strategic use of data at the beginning of each year establishes a clear baseline, enabling administration, teachers, students and parents to track progress accurately. Data is used very effectively to identify individual student strengths and areas for development and to support school organization. An example of this is the grouping of students into "pods" for individual classes as well as specialized classes, "intensives" and summer schools, to address specific learning needs or credit recovery. Data forms the basis for frequent discussions with students about their progress towards goals in advisory "crew" sessions. In addition, portfolios provide clear evidence of student progress. As a result, students are confident to articulate their learning and to analyze their own progress towards goals in discussion with peers and teachers. Parents and students receive regular and meaningful progress reports with clear information on progress and "next steps". Students particularly value these evaluations and say that the process motivates them to do better, as well as providing opportunities to celebrate their success alongside that of their friends. As one teacher said, "This tool gives students the language of assessment, so they're part of the process."

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 well developed.

All teachers are committed to ensuring that students achieve their goals. They meet frequently to review data to identify individual needs, agree strategies and to track the impact of the interventions provided to each student to improve their outcomes. This process ensures timely adjustments are made to groupings and interventions, leading to continued progress towards individual student goals. Benchmarks, including long-term and short-term goals, are clearly identified for all subjects through carefully devised

curriculum plans and rubrics. These enable students to have a very clear understanding of their learning goals and next steps across the curriculum.

Highly effective communication processes and clearly articulated leadership opportunities ensure a whole school community approach to developing goals. In response, staff and students take responsibility for the agreed objectives, develop strategies towards achieving these and track progress. As a result, the school continues to improve and develop interesting initiatives to support learning. An example of this is an additional class for proficient Spanish speakers to provide increased challenge. As one teacher said, "We're putting things in place we've all contributed to and it's exciting."

Partnerships with parents are valued and are exemplified by the regular and varied opportunities for parental involvement. As a result, parents show a very clear understanding of their child's progress towards goals. Student-led conferences provide very good opportunities for students to reflect on their learning with fellow students, teachers and parents. These are a high point for students and their families. One parent said, "This opportunity builds confidence, helps them to speak in public and prepares them for life." These occasions are just one example of the school's successful approach to involving students in reviewing their progress towards long-term goals and in revising interim goals.

Despite the school's valiant efforts and strategic approach attendance, although improving, remains low at 80%. However, this figure also includes students who are absent for maternity reasons.

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.

The broad and engaging curriculum, including arts and physical education, is enhanced by cross-curricular planning and enrichment opportunities, which the students enjoy. The very good range of technology motivates students, who are confident to use this to research, draft and present their work. Clear benchmarks and rubrics in all subjects ensure continuity and progression of expectations across classes and grades. Teachers collect and analyze a very good range of data for the groups or "pods" they teach. However, this information is not yet used consistently to plan and deliver rigorous and differentiated instruction to ensure that all students within the "pod" are suitably challenged. In the best instruction, the pace is swift and there are clear expectations of learning outcomes for all groups. In these lessons, a differentiated range of resources support learning, resulting in all students making good progress as reflected in their high quality work.

Strategic organizational decisions support learning effectively. One example is the newly created fitness suite. Effective school scheduling enables students to use this venue to learn about healthy lifestyles and routines. Students are proactive in maintaining detailed exercise logs and anecdotal writing of their progress towards goals in health and fitness, which they discuss with their teachers. Ongoing monitoring informs further goal setting and enables a good evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs. Students talk enthusiastically about the positive impact on their bodies.

This innovative expeditionary learning approach supports building relationships and self-confidence very successfully. For example, a weeklong 'Outward Bound' camp in "crews" for 9th graders results in improved understanding of the importance of team working and helps them to build positive the relationships which are maintained throughout the school. The focus on students' social development results in a mature approach to learning and very strong relationships across the school community.

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 well developed.

Frequent walkthroughs and formal observations provide administrators with a detailed picture of staff professional development needs. As a result, all teachers, including those new to the school, receive very good differentiated support, closely related to school goals and individual plans. Very good professional development opportunities include critical friends, inter-visitations and teacher-led training, enabling staff to improve their skills as well as developing their own coaching and leadership expertise. Professional development is frequently evaluated by teachers and administration. However, the impact on instruction is not always followed through thoroughly enough, leading to an inconsistent approach to using data to plan differentiated instruction.

Staff meet frequently to review practice and to plan across classes and grades to ensure consistency. The inquiry approach is successfully embedded in practice. Last year, the team identified areas of weakness in math and carefully devised interventions to address these for targeted students. The inquiry team evaluation rightly highlighted the need to analyze the effectiveness of interventions in more depth. Thus interim goal-setting and evaluation are carefully planned this year. The inquiry approach is now extended to all curriculum areas. As a result, enthusiastic teams of staff work across the school analyzing learning across subjects and examining the skills that students need to achieve their goals. This enables even more students to be identified and supported to achieve success.

Strong partnerships significantly enrich learning across the curriculum and support student welfare. Programs outside school are carefully planned with providers to ensure relevance to student needs and interests. Students speak very enthusiastically about recent opportunities to paint a mural and to appear on MSNBC news during the presidential elections. Very good relationships mean that students are confident to approach staff at any time. Teachers give their time freely to support students socially, emotionally and academically. Students say that the school "I can" approach and good career guidance raises their aspirations and builds their confidence, helping them to recognize their strengths. One student observed, "Every teacher wants us to succeed."

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 well developed.

Teachers' confidence in using the wide range of assessment data results in careful tracking of student progress and performance throughout the year and effectively informs goal setting at all levels. The well established, collaborative culture of reflection

and honest debate supports planning very effectively, enabling all staff to identify and consider the school's strengths and areas for improvement. A good example of this is the recent analysis of strategies designed to ensure that male students make good progress. Through a relevant curriculum, effective use of technology and reading materials which appeal to male students, this new strategy has demonstrated successful achievement. However in other cases analysis is less effective, for example, although data is used to make changes to groupings and the curriculum, it is not yet used consistently to inform differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Whole-school planning is very strategic, based on a careful review of the previous plan and data analysis. However, systems to record the precise processes formally to maintain a clear picture of progress towards whole school goals are still developing. The new Comprehensive Education Plan addresses this requirement and clearly identifies the school's plans to help individuals and groups of students achieve their goals. It contains long-term and interim goals which accurately reflect the school's careful analysis of what needs to be done to take the school to the next level, for example continuing to work closely with targeted families to improve student attendance.

The whole school community is committed to the principal's vision "for students to understand community health issues, to attend college and take on professional careers to make the community better." Leadership is effectively shared and all teachers are aware of their roles and responsibilities towards achieving school goals. Everyone at Validus is committed to seeking innovative ways to motivate their students and to extend learning opportunities to support students to be successful in meeting their personal and academic goals and targets. As one teacher said, "Big ideas can happen here. It's so invigorating to work in this atmosphere."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Validus Preparatory Academy	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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, DYQ, 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.

To what extent do ...	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.

To what extent do school leaders...	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.

To what extent do ...	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