

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Virgil I. Grissom School**

**Middle School Q226  
121-10 Rockaway Boulevard  
Queens  
NY 11420**

**Principal: Rushell White**

**Dates of review: December 13-14, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Michele Lloyd-Bey**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

The Virgil I. Grissom School is a middle school with 1,328 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 41% Black, 25% Hispanic, 1% White, and 32% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.0%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal articulates a clear rationale for organizational and programmatic decisions that ensure the attainment of the school's instructional goals. (1.3)
  - The principal gives a considerable amount of attention to the instructional success of her students. She purchased resources such as literacy and math materials, and ensures that all organizational decisions, such as which teachers will instruct selected students for intervention purposes, assist the school in achieving its goals. The implementation of technology has improved student motivation and engagement while addressing performance tasks. For example, in an English as a second language class, students of various languages work in small groups and use the Smart Board as a visual tool in order to build science language as they identify vertebrate and amphibians. In an effort to support the implementation of the grade 6's performance tasks, guided by the focus question "Can Animals Think?", the principal purchased a virtual tour of a zoo in Indianapolis. A new teacher was hired to push into classrooms, pull out students and support English language learners, and Smart Boards are used in most classrooms across the school. In a grade 8 class, the creative use of a Smart Board streamed the 2012 Presidential debate and led to the students' completion of standards-based essays that address the school's goal of strengthening writing across the grades. Consequently, the school's English language arts mid-year interim assessments indicate that all grades and subgroups made improvement, and grade 8 and English language learners made the greatest growth of 13% points respectively.
- The principal ensures that there is a short list of clear and focused goals that are tracked for progress and data-driven professional development planning improves teacher practice and student learning outcomes. (3.1)
  - The principal uses data from various sources such as ARIS, School Surveys, Quality Reviews, State Education's Joint Intervention Team Review information, and Progress Report data to create clearly defined, long-term goals that focus on all students, including subgroups, improving reading comprehension, math performance and developing a more positive school culture. These goals are prominently on display across the school, and identified in planning documents such as the Comprehensive Education Plan so that the school community knows the exact direction of the school and progress of its students. As a result, the leadership makes suitable adjustments, such as purchasing literacy and math support materials that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and support the instructional program.
  - There is a unified understanding of the direction that the school is taking in order to accomplish school wide goals. Goal-setting and action planning that includes targeted professional development was identified as a strategy to improve teacher questioning and the use of data to create targeted small groups for instruction. As a result, there is improved coherence and ownership for the vision of the school's course and interim

assessments reveal that all students are making continuous progress in math, with grade 6 showing an 11% increase, grade 7 indicates a 6% increase and grade 8 increased by 10%. These improvements include subgroup performance.

- The school establishes systems for classroom observations and providing feedback to teachers that intentionally facilitates professional development in order to improve teacher practice and student performance. (4.1)
  - The school has developed an observation tool that aligns with the Danielson framework, identifies questioning and discussion techniques as areas of focus, and delineates next steps for teachers. The principal shared an example of a struggling teacher who worked closely with her to support their understanding of two elements of literacy. She provided the teacher with continuous feedback and the observation feedback form identifies the specific time that she planned to return for a follow-up visit while offering focused next steps and suggestions to the teacher. A review of student work and data informs their work in teacher teams as teachers engage in the analysis of English language learners' writing and develop strategies that promote a better understanding of figurative language. As a result, the ongoing evaluation of teacher practice and the timeliness of feedback strengthened teachers' pedagogical growth in English language arts, and assessment comparison data indicate that English language learners in grades 6 through 8 made improvements in literacy and math.
  - During weekly cabinet meetings, the leadership shares observations in order to norm their expectations regarding teacher practice. They use Danielson as their lens and the information they obtain through their analysis is used to plan professional development on topics such as the Citywide Instructional Shifts in literacy and math. Close analysis of various forms of data, including school wide diagnostic assessments, drives professional development. The principal also has an effective system that uses teacher willingness to attend Children First Network training and then facilitate training that supports the school's goals to staff in the school. Consequently, the school has developed a culture of collaborative learning and support and teachers improve their practice of questioning.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen academic tasks to ensure that higher order thinking is consistently emphasized and reflected across all grades and subjects and result in a diversity of learners being cognitively engaged. (1.1)
  - The leadership works closely with staff to focus strongly on student reading and writing as key standards through the implementation of the CCLS. However, instructional practices and tasks that are assigned to students do not consistently emphasize higher order thinking. As a result, students in advanced Regents programs, including English language learners and students with special needs, are not routinely able to develop critical skills needed to support preparation for high school,

college and career. Additionally, teacher teams use a protocol to analyze student work and they evaluate their planning documents, and their own pedagogic practices, in areas such as questioning, grouping and planning to ensure that rigorous instruction is implemented. However, academic tasks that are suitably adjusted in all content areas and cognitively engage all learners, based on student work and data, are not consistently implemented across the school. Hence, tasks vary widely and do not always reflect rigorous instruction for a range of students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

- Develop more effective teaching strategies across classrooms to include consistently offering multiple entry points to students in order to generate high levels of student participation and thinking to promote deeper learning. (1.2)
  - Students are typically grouped for instruction in all classes based on their interim assessment skills performance. However, in most classrooms, there is no indication that groups are flexible in order to provide multiple entry points into the curriculum, and assignments are inconsistently differentiated. As a result, there is an uneven demonstration of higher order thinking coming from challenging tasks for a diversity of learners.
  - In a grade 6 honors class, students engage in a performance task activity centering on the question, “Can Animals Think?” After working in small groups, students present to their peers textual evidence to support the analysis of details related to the text, “Who is Smarter, Cats or Dogs?” However, this kind of engagement is not noted in all classes. In addition, while students across the school engage in small group discussions, these discussions do not typically reflect high levels of student thinking based on analyzing problem solving or text-based analysis. As a result, there is an uneven demonstration of higher order thinking and participation and not all students benefit from lessons that cognitively engage them and reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.
- Deepen the use of formative assessments data to support instructional planning in order to make adjustments to meet the learning needs of all students. (2.2)
  - The leadership ensures that common assessments are used across the school in core subjects to monitor student progress, and teachers use this data to create new groups based on how well students perform on specific skills in English language arts and math. However, formative assessments are not typically created and/or used by classroom teachers to plan for the individual needs of a diversity of learners within the unit of study. Hence, the analysis of student progress and the identification of trends are not fully realized by every teacher in order for them to make effective, targeted adjustments to curriculum and instruction.
  - Teachers commonly ask questions during the lesson and they also circulate the classroom, pausing at various tables to address the needs of students in small groups. For example, in a grade 8 science class, students work in small groups while the teacher circulates and supports them in completing a distance and time graph. However, across the school, not all teachers use various forms of checks for understanding, including self-assessments. For instance, in one grade 7 English

language arts class, the teacher was observed moving forward with the lesson while some students still struggled with their assigned task. Hence, teachers do not habitually and consistently make effective adjustments to their instruction and some students do not receive the support needed to help them become cognizant of their next learning steps.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Virgil I. Grissom School	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		X					
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		X					
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an <b>inquiry approach</b> that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>