

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**Virgil I. Grissom School**

**Middle School 226**

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

**Principal: Rushell S. White**

**Dates of review: May 5-6, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Sandra Litrico**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Virgil I. Grissom School is a junior high school with 1366 students from 6th through grade 8. The school population comprises 43% Black, 19% Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native 8%, 2% White, and 28% Asian students. The student body includes 5% 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 2012 - 2013 was 91%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Students benefit from an engaging and standards-based curriculum that incorporates college and career readiness with resources and programs that support learning for a variety of learners. (1.1)
  - The adoption and implementation of Code X in literacy and CMP3 in math strengthen the alignment of the curriculum to content standards and the instructional shifts. The math curriculum is supplemented with Engage NY tasks. Pacing calendars exist in all subject areas and curricula are modified periodically in order to strengthen the instructional core across classrooms. Students engage in instructional tasks that culminate in two performance tasks in core subjects and two writing tasks in minor subjects. In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts class, students engaged in a Socratic seminar and analyzed and evaluated the Preamble to the United States Constitution. In the social studies and English language arts classrooms observed, students were asked to cite evidence to support their claims. Students identified the factors that led to the outbreak of World War II based on articles and research using iPads. They engaged in group discussions as they evaluated the role of dictators around the world. Math lessons focused on real world problem solving application and using math tools as needed. Science lessons were inquiry-based and included guided experience, demonstration, experiment and recording of observations and conclusions. Reading and writing strategies and vocabulary development are included in all content area units of study. All lesson plans include instructional shifts as evident in students building knowledge, citing evidence from text and using academic vocabulary. As a result, there is coherence across grade levels and tasks that promote college and career readiness and engage all students including English language learners and special education students.
- The principal has made informed and effective organizational decisions to support school-wide goals and long-range action plans across all aspects of the school that result in improvements in student learning. (1.3)
  - Monies are allocated to purchase books, materials and supplementary programs to support the school's instructional goals which focus on improving students' progress and achievement in literacy and mathematics. Common core non-fiction classroom libraries and trade books were purchased in addition to intervention programs including Achieve 3000, Voyager Math, Imagine Learning and V Port-Language. These programs have provided students with vocabulary and skill development in addition to multiple entry points for sub groups including English language learners and students with disabilities in Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes. Students are tracked in the programs and have shown progress. Monies are also allocated for an English language learner after school program and a Saturday Academy. The principal also hired six English language arts and six math substitute teachers to provide small group instruction for identified students in the lowest third. The teachers push into classrooms to minimize teacher-student ratio five

days a week from November until May. This has resulted in improvement in student achievement as evidenced by a 9% growth in sixth grade ELA scores on the periodic assessments. With an eye on long range planning these substitute teachers are also trained and evaluated for consideration when a vacancy arises. As a result, those hired have proven to be effective teachers since they are familiar with the curricula and know the students, staff and school community, thus holding themselves accountable among faculty for student progress. The school has unique opportunities that promote college and career readiness and develop all students as lifelong leaders and learners with practices that bolster their middle school experience. The Rush Program provides art development for students in the Humanities Academy. DNA splicing is offered to students in the Visionaries Academy. Jupiter Productions provides students with Broadcast journalism instruction for students in the Renaissance Academy. The Distance Learning Program allows students opportunities to video conference with students within the council district 28 and industry professionals. Young men Leadership Group is designed to address the needs of at-risk black male students with mentors from JP Morgan Chase. ARP/High school courses allow students the opportunity for high school coursework and high school and Regents credits. These effective organizational decisions and collaborations with community based organizations support improvements in student learning and result in improved student outcomes as evidenced by high quality student work products.

- Administrators and teachers analyze data gathered from common assessments across disciplines to provide actionable feedback to students and adjust curricular and instructional practices. (2.2)
  - The school has systems in place to track the performance and progress of individual students. Staff gathers a range of relevant data such as content diagnostic assessments, performance-based assessments, unit and interim assessments across all subjects to understand student performance and identify trends to plan instruction, create intervention strategies, and share with students so that they know what to improve. Teachers receive regular updates about student assessment results and meet with their assigned assistant principal to review and analyze data. Teachers adjust their instructional practices if data shows students are not progressing in identified areas. For example, teachers rewrote unit tasks and prompts, created templates to use during math to assist with problem solving along with other effective instructional modifications. During common planning sessions, the English language arts, social studies/English Intervention team looked at student work and developed plans for improvement of student performance based on assessment data. They also provided extra support by grouping students in response to the data. School leaders create spreadsheets to check the performance of different grades and invite identified students for academic intervention services including after-school and Saturday programs. Datacation/Skedula Program is also used to help teachers, parents and administrators monitor student performance and track their growth. As a result of these efforts, student action plans for increasing student progress and performance have been developed including in-classroom support and additional intervention programs. Students in the lowest third subgroup in English language arts and math made

considerable improvements as evidenced by the CodeX and CMP3 unit and interim assessment data.

- The school leaders communicate high expectations to the entire school community including teachers, students and parents and have created a culture of accountability for these expectations. (3.4)
  - The principal has raised the bar and has articulated clear expectations for students and staff. She expects all students to do well in middle school, high school and college. As a result, students have set these goals for themselves and have a positive attitude about school. The majority of students interviewed discussed their plans for college and spoke about the College Fair that they attended at the school. The guidance counselors meet with students and parents to advise them regarding high school choices and discuss future goals. The school also sponsors a Career Day to give students an opportunity to talk to people about their jobs and learn more about the requirements. Students are making connections to what they are studying now and potential career choices. The principal has ensured that the curriculum exposes students to a wide variety of experiences that include the arts through partnerships and grants. Across classrooms, students are engaged in meaningful discussions and project-based learning so that they own their educational experiences and are prepared for the next level. Furthermore, the school's instructional focus outlines expectations for staff with a professional development plan that supports teacher practice in questioning, discussion and assessment. All teachers are expected to engage in professional development to improve their instructional practices as measured by the Danielson Framework. Administrators also provide professional development and schedule intervisitations based on student data results to ensure every student is receiving quality instruction. Students are taught valuable lessons on how to develop good study habits, and set high goals for achievement. Family outreach supports these initiatives with the hiring of two community associates and a parent coordinator. Parents attend workshops to understand what their children are expected to learn and do. The school provides workshops on core curriculum, standards and invites parents to school events including the opening reception of Better Future, the Rush Gallery Exhibit which highlights their children's artistic talents. As a result, high expectations are communicated to the entire community including the teachers, students, and parents and there is a system of accountability for these expectations with appropriate supports to ensure student success.

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

- Develop teacher pedagogy across classrooms that exemplify high level questioning, student discussion and provide multiple entry points that result in high levels of thinking, participation, and student work. (1.2)
  - Most classes are clearly guided by the Danielson Framework, which provides a coherent set of beliefs for staff about what quality instruction includes. In a grade 8 classroom, students engaged in a debate that focused on the primary cause of the Great Depression. The students were asked, "Do you think better management of funds would have helped the Great Depression? What evidence have you gathered to

support your point of view?” Students engaged in a debate that promoted rich discussions. Each team stated their claims and discussed the pros and cons of evidence cited from their research. In a grade 6 class, there was a text-based discussion as students grappled with how different authors use varied techniques to illustrate the challenges faced by children in *We Were There Too* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. However, although some classes were marked by high-level questioning and student-to-student discussion, only one grade 8 class is implementing strategies, such as Socratic Seminars and there are some classes that featured only a few students responding to teacher questions. As the sixth grade students in one class wrote informational essays comparing and contrasting writing strategies used by each author across three texts, the teacher conferences with a student and asked the child low level questions including “What are you reading?”; “How do you know this is a mystery?” Another teacher spent too much time on the mini lesson and discussing what each group would be doing leaving limited time for students to work on their World War II research projects. Some classes strategically incorporated numerous practices to provide for multiple entry points, with graphic organizers, leveled texts and high quality supports into the curricula. However, most of the lesson plans reviewed did not include instructional modifications. The students in the grade 8 special education class all read the same article on social media and the only modification was having a choice of writing a persuasive letter or essay. In addition, the questions posed during ‘turn and talk’ were not differentiated and did not promote student discussion. These inconsistencies across classrooms result in uneven levels of student thinking, participation, and student work that exemplifies higher order thinking skills.

- Improve structured professional collaborations so that teams of teachers engage in action research that strengthens teacher practice and student progress. (4.2)
  - Although teachers participate regularly on teams, most teams do not have clear instructional focus supported by professional structures and protocols. There is little evidence that the focus of the work of the teams involves sustained instructional inquiry that promotes the instructional shifts and results in shared improvements in teacher practice. The teams observed did not have an agenda. Although they looked at one piece of student work and identified student strengths and areas for improvement, it was a random selection and there were no protocols used in examining student work. One teacher attributed the student’s weaknesses to a lack of student motivation and parent involvement. As a result, there was little alignment with the school’s goals of designing engaging and challenging academic tasks or improving student outcomes. One group of teachers did share strategies they have found to be successful including restating and annotating, but did not share which groups of students had success with these strategies. Furthermore, teams do not identify or target groups of students to focus on their progress toward goals and, therefore, have not identified a teaching practice(s) that they have analyzed and researched with the exception of the math teacher who was involved in a collaborative project. As a result, the work of the majority of teacher teams shows little impact on student achievement and teacher practice.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Virgil I. Grissom	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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?			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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach 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>