



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Virgil I. Grissom

Middle School Q226

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

Principal: Rushell White

**Date of review: March 25, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Mary Barton**

The School Context

Virgil I. Grissom is a middle school with 1,060 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 39% Black, 19% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 17% Hispanic, 1% White, and 24% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.4%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for teaching and professional learning that is connected to a path of college and career readiness. The school provides students and families with multiple opportunities to learn about student progress.

Impact

School leaders have a system of accountability for holding staff accountable. Students and families gain information and support about student strengths and next steps and all are aware of the school's instructional expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers receive a handbook early in the school year that communicates policies and procedures. The citywide instructional expectations ground the work that is done by school leaders and teachers. Teachers receive professional learning around these expectations along with feedback around the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers are provided with a model lesson plan template for their use if they so choose. Peer instructional coaches work with teachers who through the observation process need support in a particular competency. Teachers visit demonstration teachers' classrooms to help them learn and grow in their practice. The principal and her supervisory team, through the observation process, hold teachers accountable and look for evidence of growth after professional learning opportunities are provided.
- Students and families have multiple ways to inform parents of school events and learning that occurs including a school website, monthly newsletter, and the use of school messenger. The school also provides multiple ways for students and families to track student progress including individual mid-year conferences with each family in addition to the twice yearly report card conferences. Progress reports and report cards are sent home and progress is tracked using the online Pupil Path system which all students and families have access to. Students, teachers and families can track student reading levels using the online myOn reading system which gives students and families information on appropriate texts and strategies that can be used to support students at home. At the parent meeting, parents spoke to appreciating all of the supports and information provided to them by the school.
- In preparing students for the next level as well as for college and career, students are held to a high standard but receive support toward meeting those standards. The school offers many opportunities for students to experience activities that broaden their horizons including a young men's leadership group supported by the PENCIL program with mentors provided by JPMorgan Chase where students learn about the expectation for college and career and come to school for particular activities dressed professionally.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, pedagogy is aligned to the curricula and reflects a school wide belief about how students learn best that is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching through high levels of student discussion and engagement.

Impact

There is implementation of multiple entry points, consistent student engagement by learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners, in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstration of higher order thinking skills in all student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The school belief is that students learn best through hands-on, research based, student centered instruction that is designed to meet them at their entry points. Across classrooms visited, teachers had students were working in groups on tiered tasks. For example, in a social studies class, the teacher had groups of students were working on tasks that required them to use their textbooks and I-pads to research causes of the Great Depression around particular questions posed. Students were expected to use text evidence from multiple sources and work together to form a response that would be shared with the class.
- In an English language arts class with the teacher providing minimal facilitation in order to enable students to play a maximum role, students were engaged in a Socratic Seminar looking at non-fiction text around life on other planets. Students had taken notes on two texts provided so that they would be able to answer classmates with text evidence supporting a particular claim and/or counterclaim. Other students not in the circle were responsible for evaluating a particular classmate using a template and would have the opportunity to provide feedback.
- In a science class, students were engaged in using microscopes and observed specimens and recorded their observations. The teacher grouped students according to the results of a pre-assessment in the science unit along with interim assessment data. Students had the opportunity to view an array of slides and recorded their findings on a lab sheet. Students also were asked to speak to the results of their investigation and discuss how the world would be different if there were no microscopes to view specimens.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers plan and revise units of study and create rigorous tasks based on data and incorporate other resources to strengthen them.

Impact

Curricula decisions work to build coherence and to meet students at their entry points. Academic tasks enable students to utilize higher order thinking skills and to develop rigorous habits to have college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school utilizes Code X as the main resource for the English language arts (ELA) curricula. Additionally, ELA teachers select novels to supplement the program and have students participate in Literature Circles where students have defined roles and participate in discussions where they are expected to provide text evidence to support their thinking.
- The school used Connected Math Program (CMP3) as the basis for the math curricula last school year but found that it did not meet all students' needs. Teachers felt that additional resources were needed to meet the entry points of all students and the decision was made to use resources from GoMath as well. Teachers plan tasks taking elements of both programs and make it work for students.
- Units and lessons include essential questions. Teachers meet in teams to create and modify units of study as well as indicate modifications for English language learners and students with disabilities. For example, a social studies unit poses the question, "Why do people create, structure and change governments?" Another unit asks, "How do competing views of power and morality lead to global conflict?" Tasks are tiered by teachers to enable students to have entry points into their learning.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned to the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

Teachers provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. The use of assessments has led to actionable next steps so students are aware of areas of need of improvement and teachers use data to inform instruction and grouping of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grades and content areas, rubrics are aligned to the school's grading policy which is accessible to all students. During the student meeting, students stated that they receive rubrics before the start of a task so that they know the expectations for the assignment and receive feedback. One student stated that he appreciated the feedback he receives "because I know what I need to do to get better." Students also spoke to being able to self-assess their work and peer assess classmates work which was observed in work products viewed in the school, as well as in classroom visits. One example of peer assessment viewed was in a social studies class in which the students were participating in a Socratic Seminar again. Students have tools they used to assess an assigned classmate as to their level of participation, as well as use of text evidence to support an argument.
- Teachers use common assessments to track student progress. Four NYS simulated interim assessments, created by teachers, are administered in English language arts, math, social studies and science in September, November, January and March using resources such as Engage New York and I-Ready to mirror the Common Core Learning Standards expectations. Data from these assessments are used to modify units of study based on trends, as well for grouping of students. Unit assessments from Code X and CMP3 are administered as well, and results are analyzed to use in modifying curricula, units and lessons. Teachers maintain assessment portfolios whereby student progress is tracked and students can be assigned for further supports such as the Saturday Academy or Academic Intervention Services (AIS) during the day or after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- Knowing the importance of tracking sub group progress, the school's data team tracks the progress of all grades and sub groups including students with disabilities and English language learners and the lowest 1/3 of students. They are able to see if the school is on target to meet the school's S/CEP goals. Similar tracking is done around both the unit assessments in Code X and CMP 3 and on the interim assessments administered in English language, math, social studies and science.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across the school, horizontal and vertical teams engage structured, inquiry based professional collaborations analyzing assessment data and student work.

Impact

Inquiry based professional collaborations result in improved pedagogy, coherent implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly and have developed structures for meetings including the use of agendas, looking at student work protocols, minutes and other materials. At an English language arts team meeting viewed, teachers were looking at the results of a recent Code X unit assessment. Teachers had already placed students across the grade, based on their results, into quartiles, and were examining particular patterns and trends of these students surfacing their understandings and misunderstandings. They looked at skills that needed to be retaught which included annotating text. Teachers then drew up an action plan for this which included modeling this for students, as well as having students practice annotating with texts of topics that were of interest to them so that they would be engaged in the process.
- Teachers spoke of the support provided by school leaders, teacher leaders, consultants and members of the network who support the school around their team work in studying data and trends, using the information to modify curricula and in learning new instructional strategies that are used to improve their practice. Teachers are encouraged to visit demonstration teachers in the school and are supported by peer instructional coaches. One special education teacher spoke of how she implemented strategies around asking additional higher order questions in lessons and found that her students became more engaged in their classroom activities.
- Teacher teams also look at results of interim assessments, administered four times yearly in the core subjects to understand trends by grade, classes and individual students. Based on this data, teachers plan for modifications to curricula, unit and lesson plans in order to meet the needs of particular groups of students.