



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Veritas Academy

25Q240

**35-01 Union Street
Flushing
NY 11354**

**Principal:
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**Date of review: December 19, 2014
Lead Reviewer:
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The School Context

Veritas Academy is a high school with 274 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population is comprised of 15% Black, 53% Hispanic, 11% White and 19% Asian and 2% other students. The student body includes 13.5% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91.0%.

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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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:	Well Developed
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Findings

High expectations are consistently messaged to staff regarding professionalism, communication, and the school's focus of the Renzulli Learning system to enhance teaching and learning. PTA meetings, the school website, and parent requested workshops keep families well informed of student progress towards college and career readiness creating effective partnerships with parents in a learning culture that systematically communicates unified core beliefs about student learning.

Impact

The school's core beliefs about student learning and the impact it has on successful academic achievement, has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability amongst staff, students, and their families. Structures have been established to provide a clear path towards college and career readiness where all students are provided with opportunities to work on their own talent profiles that the faculty utilizes to create a deeper understanding of student strengths and interests to deeply engage students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school website informs and reinforces school-wide expectations and the instructional focus as well as encourages parents and students to provide feedback through communication with teachers through an internal email system.
- A weeklong professional development at the University of Connecticut provided all staff members with a total immersion in the Renzulli model that has resulted in a culture of mutual accountability for the high expectations of developing a lifelong love of learning in students.
- High expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness is communicated to all students through the Advisory Program that meets three times a week when teachers conference with students about their academic progress and provide them with feedback to help prepare them for the next level of learning.
- Parents, students with disabilities, English language learners, and the student government president and vice president shared that teachers use "college language" and teach them to use the APA format as well as provide guidance and support for their research projects with feedback highlighting strength and next steps.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

While the school community embraces the core beliefs that students learn best when focusing on their individual strengths, talents, and interests, the pedagogical implementation is inconsistent across classrooms.

Impact

All students are supported to produce interest-based investigative research projects across curricula. However, there are lapses in teaching strategies that strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports necessary to engage all students in high levels of thinking in the development of student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Conversations with parents and students highlighted that all students have opportunities to choose from a menu of project options in research projects and other tasks. They learn to research and write papers aligned to college level expectations. Teachers utilize scaffolded supports to engage students with their writing as observed in the ninth grade integrated collaborative teaching English language arts (ELA) class, where students were paired to do a peer review of their writing, using a research project check list.
- In a grade ten self-contained ELA class, students worked in pairs to discuss and assess each other's work to determine the "author's purpose," using scaffolds provided by the teacher in the form of a peer assessment checklist and examples of how to give a partner comments. Students then rehearsed their comments with each other before they presented their work in front of the whole class. When asked by the teacher how the process went for them after their presentation, one student replied that he used to be shy when he looked at people and now he was confident. However, during a lesson that infused video conferencing in a grade nine self-contained US History class, students sat in groups, watching and listening to the professor on the screen sharing information about American Indians. While the video conferencing provided a different venue for learning to meet different learning needs, only when the teacher interrupted the professor and prompted the students to ask questions were they able to actively participate in the lesson.
- In a grade ten English language arts class, students were studying "the artist and architect Maya Lin, and how her identity influenced her work". Students were sketching out individual landforms that might represent something they have a connection to. Students were focused on creating "contour lines to illustrate elevation" and were able to articulate how they represented their identities through the art of the topographical maps to reach a deeper understanding of the unit topic: "My Space, Your Space, Our Space: Access and Boundaries".
- Across the vast majority of classrooms visited, students sat in groups. In a grade ten Global History integrated co-teaching class, students had a group discussion on whether they think history should credit Alexander the Great with being a hero or a villain. However, in a Living Environment class, students were working individually in their groups to answer the Regent's questions on worksheets with no student-to-student discussions, leading to a deeper understanding of the concepts they were studying.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

All curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Research skills, culminating in research projects, are embedded in a coherent way across grades and content areas. All students are engaged in the academic tasks of their interests.

Impact

The school's administrative team and staff members collaborate on curricular decisions to build coherence in instruction as well as the culminating tasks developed for all learners that promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The Curriculum Cabinet, which is comprised of department heads and staff members, meets weekly to share content area ideas and suggestions and to ensure curriculum coherence. For example, the team produced a Research Project Skills checklist to be implemented across grades and content areas to support the school's academic goals and measure the necessary skills for college readiness in all students.
- Unit and lesson plans provide evidence that the school has a coherent pedagogical approach to planning, which includes Common Core learning standards aligned objectives, application of academic vocabulary, multiple entry points and formative assessments.
- The lesson plan template suggested for all teachers emphasize multiple entry points and differentiated tasks for all learners. For example, Algebra 1 lesson plans included multiple performance tasks for students to choose from. There is also a Chinese version of the same tasks provided for English language learners. During the meeting with students, one English language learner invited to the meeting shared that he had been in America for just four months and that he is working on a project called "Pros and Cons of Marijuana" with the support of his advisory teacher.
- In keeping with the school-wide guidelines for research projects, each subject area designs its project and project guidelines to ensure content specific skills, which are aligned with CCLS and the instructional shifts. For example, the English project required students to present an argument that attempts to solve a problem or change someone's thinking. The Social Studies project required students to think like historians and study human history and understand the world in hopes of finding relevance in our lives and forging a deep connection with Social Studies.
- The school was founded as a Renzulli school of learning, that believes in developing each student's unique profile of gifts and talents and provides challenging and enjoyable learning experiences by having all students do interest-based investigations and real-world project-based learning in all content areas. These projects include Pros and Cons of Marijuana and Social and Political Injustice of Arabic Women, to name a few.

Findings

The school administers common assessments in all subject areas with midterm and final examinations to inform Regent's performance. Ongoing classroom assessments are planned in units and lessons.

Impact

The common assessments are aligned with both Common Core learning standards and the instructional shifts, and the school uses the assessment data to inform instructional decisions, which resulted in the implementation of writing across all content areas to support all students to achieve increased mastery in writing.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has Summer Projects in English language arts and Math, which are posted on the school website, for the incoming ninth graders to assess their social emotional data, writing skills, and math concepts. Teachers analyze the student work to identify skills and use this data for planning and strategic grouping of students.
- The school administers midterm and final examinations to assess students' content area knowledge and academic skills, and the summative assessments data are used for planning and adjustment of instruction. For example, the school identified that students need further support building interpretation of authors' purposes. In a grade ten self-contained English language arts class, we observed students using a rubric to peer assess and self-asses their understanding of an authors' purpose.
- In the Advisory Program, each student is assigned a teacher who meets with the student three times a week to monitor their study skills development and their progress on meeting the academic goals. Teachers have scheduled "office hours" for following up on students' "area in need of support" and provide students meaningful feedback and next steps to help students progress towards mastery.
- The school's unit map templates reflect Grant Wiggins' principles regarding the design of formative and summative assessments to diagnose student needs and guide teaching to determine whether learning goals have been achieved. Across the vast majority of classrooms visited, teachers used task response checklists, exit slips, content specific rubrics, next steps/Alerts, end of class reflection on progress, peer editing checklists, and peer assessment checklists. The school has a research project skills checklist to ensure that students experience reading comprehension, writing, verbal, listening comprehension, data, technology and artistic skills at least once in completing each research project across all grades and subjects areas.
- During the meeting, students indicated that teachers' feedback includes strength of the work done and actionable next steps. A student with disabilities shared his work that demonstrated a teacher's specific comments and clear next steps to achieve mastery. Conversations with parents revealed that students communicate with their teachers and get feedback while working on their projects.

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

While the school Curriculum Cabinet meets regularly and makes instructional decisions based on the information from department chairpersons, the consistent process and protocols for data and student work analysis within teacher teams are in the process of becoming embedded.

Impact

The work of the Curriculum Cabinet, which is comprised of teacher/department chairpersons in ELA, Math, Social Studies, Science, and Technology, make key curricula and pedagogical decisions to ensure instructional focus and coherence leading to improved pedagogical practice and increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The weekly Curriculum Cabinet team collaborates and discusses current school practices, including analyzing student Math Regents performance data and assigning teachers to work with those students who performed at the lowest levels; reviewing CEP goals; reviewing ninth and tenth grade math units; and revising the “Project Skills Checklist.”
- The Social Emotional Inquiry Team, led by the guidance counselor, meets twice a month to assess students’ academic achievement and social emotional growth. At the team meeting observed, the guidance counselor followed the list of students referred by teachers and discussed with the team how to use different approaches to support each student.
- The school has established a Protocol for Instructional Inquiry, including steps for analysis of student work by department. One Academic Inquiry Team Log reveals the analysis of ninth grade student writing in mathematics, with documented strategies for support, the intended impact on student achievement, and next steps.
- The review of the documents of a Special Education Self-contained Student Inquiry team revealed three teachers’ analysis of a student’s writing they were focused on and their individual findings, which resulted in the agreed upon next steps to help the student.